THE SONG OF THE BLOOD-RED FLOWER

JOHANNES LINNANKOSKI

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BY

JOHANNES LINNANKOSKI

TRANSLATED FROM THE FINNISH

BY

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CONTENTS

	PAGE
The Fairy of the Forest	1
Gazelle	9
A Mother's Eyes	17
Father and Son	22
Pansy	27
At Sunrise	46
Rowan	53
The First Snowfall	58
Daisy	63
The Rapids	80
The Song of the Blood-Red Flower	97
Water-Sprite and Water-Witch	105
The Camp-Fire at Neitokallio	112
Hawthorn	119
Sister Maya	124
Clematis	131
Dark Furrows	144
To the Dregs	147
By the Roadside	158
The Cupboard	162

PAGE

THE HOUSE BUILDING 171

WAYS THAT MEET 178

MOISIO 182

THE BROKEN STRING 189

THE BRIDAL CHAMBER 197

THE SOMNAMBULIST 206

OUT OF THE PAST 213

THE MARK 218

THE PILGRIMAGE 227

THE RECKONING 237

WAITING 243

THE HOMECOMING 249

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THE FAIRY OF THE FOREST

THE setting sun shone on the wooded slopes of the hill. He clasped the nearest trees in a burning embrace, offered his hand to those farther off, and gave to them all a sparkling smile.

There was joy on the hillside.

The summer wind told fairy tales from the south. Told of the trees there, how tall they are, how dense the forests, and the earth, how it steams in the heat. How the people are dark as shadows, and their eyes flashing with light. And all the trees in the wood strained their ears to listen.

The cuckoo perched in the red-blossomed pine, near the reddest cluster of all. "It may be as lovely as lovely can be," cuckooed he, "but nowhere does the heart throb with delight as in Finland forests in spring, and nowhere is such music in the air."

All the hillside nodded approvingly.

In a little glade half-way down the slope some newly-felled firs lay tumbled this way and that—their red-blossomed tops were trembling still.

On one of the stems a youth was seated.

He was tall and slender, as the trees he had just felled.

His hat swung on a twig, coat and waistcoat were hung on a withered branch. His strong brown chest showed behind the white of the open shirt; the upturned sleeves bared his powerful, sunburnt arms. He sat leaning forward, looking at his right arm, bending and stretching it, watching the muscles swell and the sinews tighten under the skin.

The young man laughed.

He caught up his axe, held it straight out at arm's length, and flourished it gaily.

"Twenty-five down already, and the axe as light as ever!"

The cuckoo called. The young man looked toward the top of the hill. "A wonderful spring," he thought. "Never have the trees flowered so blood-red and bright, nor the brook sung so merrily, nor the cuckoo called so near. 'Twould be no surprise to see the wood-sprite herself come out from the trees."

He rested his head in his hands.

"Some say they never come nowadays, but Grandfather, he's seen them himself. They're grown shy, now that the woods are being cleared."

"Come, strawberry blossom,
Come, raspberry blossom,
Come, little cows,
It is late."

The sound came from the other side of the hill, like a tinkle of silver bells on a lonely winter road.

The young man's heart beat faster. He started up, and turned towards the sound, holding his breath to listen. But he heard nothing more, save the heavy throbbing in his breast.

He took a few steps forward and stopped. "Will she come this way, or . . ."

"Come, summer star,
Come, little cows,
Hurry home."

It seemed quite close now, just beyond the ridge.

"Coming—she is coming this way!" He hurried on again, but, startled at his own impatience, stopped once more, stepped back, and stood with his eyes fixed on the crest of the hill.

Something golden shone through the trees, something that fluttered in the wind. Below the gold a white blouse, a slender waist, and then a blue skirt.

"The fairy of the forest!"

The girl was standing on the hilltop. She shaded her eyes, and began walking toward the farther slope. What now? He was on the point of racing after her, then jumped on to a tree stem, and put his hands to his mouth as if to shout. Suddenly he dropped his hands and stood irresolute. Then he jumped down, picked up his axe, mounted the stem again, and looked at the girl intently.

"Wait till she gets to the big fir yonder; then if she doesn't look round, I'll give one blow of the axe and see if she'll hear."

The girl walked on—the axe was raised. . . .

"Come, summer star . . ."

She turned round, and caught sight of him, started, and stopped, blushing as she stood.

"Olof!"

"Annikki!"

He sprang down and hastened toward the girl.

She too came nearer.

"You here? And never said a word! How you frightened me!"

"I was just going to call when you turned round."

They shook hands, heartily, as comrades.

"Look!" he cried eagerly; "isn't it just like a palace all round—the castle of Tapio, and I'm the lord of the castle, and you're the forest fairy, come to visit me. And your clothes smell of the pine woods, and there's a scent of birch in your hair, and you come playing on a shepherd's pipe, music sweet as honey. . . ."

The girl looked up in astonishment. "What—what makes you talk like that?"

He stopped in some perplexity. "'Tis the forest talks so. But now you must come in—right in to the palace."

They went through to the middle of the clearing.

"And have you felled all those, all by yourself?" She cast a warm glance at his sunburnt neck and powerful shoulders. "How strong you are!"

The boy stepped on more briskly.

"There! Now we're in the palace. And here's the seat of honour—isn't it fine? And here's a bench at the side—but a guest must always have the seat of honour."

"And what about the master of the house?" asked the girl, with a laugh.

"He'll sit on the bench, of course."

They smiled at each other.

"And see, it's decked out all ready, with sprays of green and red fir blossoms."

"Yes, indeed—a real palace. It's two years now since

we had a talk together, and now to meet in a palace . . .!"

"We've not seen much of each other, it's true," said he, with a ring of remembrance in his voice. "And we used to be together whole summers in the old days. Do you remember how you were mistress of the house, with twenty-five milch cows in the shed, and as many sheep as Jacob at the end of his last year's service?"

"Yes, yes, I remember." Her blue eyes sparkled, and the two young people's laughter echoed over the hillside.

The forest woke from his dreams, and stopped to listen to the tale of the children at play.

"And how we played snowballs on the way home from school? And your hair was all full of snow, and I took it down—do you remember?—and did it up again in the middle of the road."

"Yes, and did it all wrong; and the others laughed."

The trees winked at one another as if they had never heard such talk before.

"And the confirmation classes after!" said the girl warmly. "Oh, I shall never forget that time—the lovely summer days, and the shady birches near the church. . . ."

The trees nodded. The house with a cross on top—all they had heard of it was the bell that rang there, and the big firs had wondered what it was. Now here were human beings themselves telling what went on inside.

"And you've grown up to a great big girl since then! It seems so strange—as if you were the same and not the same."

"And you!" The gentle warmth of a woodland summer played in the girl's blue eyes. "A tall, big woodcutter you've grown."

They were silent for a while.

The trees listened breathlessly.

A warm flood rose in the young man's breast—like a summer wave washing the sands of an untrodden shore.

The girl's kerchief had fallen from her head. He picked it up and gave it to her. Through the thin stuff their fingers touched; the youth felt a thrill in every limb. Suddenly he grasped her hands, his eyes gazing ardently into hers.

"Annikki!" he whispered. He could find no words for the tumult in his veins. "Annikki!" he gasped again, entreatingly.

A faint flush had risen to her cheeks, but her glance met his calmly and frankly. She pressed his hand in answer.

"More than anyone else in all the world?" he asked passionately.

She pressed his hand again, more warmly still.

He was filled with joy, yet somehow uneasy and confused. He wanted to say something—warm, fervent words. Or do something—throw himself at her feet and clasp her knees—anything. But he dared not.

Then his eyes fell on one of the treetops close by. He slipped one hand free, and broke off a cluster of blood-red flowers.

"Take them—will you? In memory of how you came to the castle—to Tapiosborg."

"Olofsborg," she laughed.

The word broke the spell. They looked at each other, and again their laughter rang through the woods.

He drew closer to her side, and tried to fasten the red flowers at her breast. But as he bent down, his hair touched hers. He felt it first as a soft, secret caress, hardly daring

to believe it, then it was like a burning current through his body, that stayed tingling like fire in his veins. His breath seemed to choke him, his heart felt as if it would burst. Passionately he threw his arms about her and held her close.

The girl blushed. She made no resistance, but hid her troubled face against his shoulder.

He pressed her closer. Through her thin blouse he could feel her blood burning against his breast. He felt his senses going, a painful weakness seemed to stifle him, as if only a violent movement could give him breath. Feverishly he clenched his left hand, that was round her waist; with his right beneath her chin he raised her head.

"Annikki!" he whispered, his lips still nearer. "Only one. . . ."

She drew away, shaking her head, and looked at him reproachfully.

"How can you ask? You know—you know it wouldn't be right."

"Then you don't care for me, as you said!" he cried passionately, as if accusing her of faithlessness.

The girl burst into tears, her slight shoulders quivering. The cluster of flowers fell to the ground.

"My flowers . . ." she cried.

A flush of shame burned in the young man's cheek. As if stricken powerless, his hands loosed their hold, and he set the girl down by his side.

She was trembling still. He gazed at her helplessly, as one who has done wrong without intent.

"Annikki!" he said imploringly. "Forgive me, Annikki. I don't know what made me do it. If you only knew how sorry I am."

The girl looked up, smiling through her tears. "I know —I know you would never try to hurt me."

"And you'll be just the same now—as if nothing had happened—will you?"

He took her hand, and his eyes sought hers. And trustingly she gave him both.

"May I put them there again?" he asked shyly, picking up the flowers from the ground.

The girl laughed; the blossom laughed.

"And then I must go—mother is waiting."

"Must you?"

They rose to their feet, and he fastened the blossoms at her breast.

"How good you are!" he said, with a sense of unspeakable joy and thankfulness.

"And you too. . . . Good-bye, Olof."

"Good-bye—fairy!"

He stood in the clearing, watching her as she went, till the last glimpse of her had vanished between the trees.

She turned round once, and the red flowers in her white blouse burned like the glow of the setting sun on a white cloud.

"I'll fell no more to-day," said the youth, and sat down on a fallen tree, with his head in his hands.

GAZELLE

"My love is like a strawberry sweet,
Strawberry sweet, strawberry sweet.
I'll dance with her when next we meet,
Next we meet, next we meet!"

THE song came as a welcome from the playing-fields of the village as Olof climbed the hill; it lightened his step, forcing him to keep time.

Even the trees around seemed waving to the tune; the girls' thin summer dresses fluttered, and here and there gay ribbons in their hair.

"Come in the ring, Olof, come in the ring!"

Some of the girls broke the chain, and offered their hands.

There was Sunday merriment in the air, and all were intoxicated with spring. The stream flowed glittering through the fields, with a shimmer of heat above. The dancers quickened their pace almost to a run. The lads had pushed their hats back, the sweat stood in beads on their foreheads; the girls smiled with bright eyes, dimpled cheeks a-quiver, and heaving breast.

"My love is like a cranberry fair,
A cranberry fair, a cranberry fair.
For none but me she'll ever care,
She'll ever care, and ever care."

"Oh, it's too hot—let's try another game!" cried one. "Let's play last man out—that gives you time to breathe."

"Yes—yes. Here's my partner!"

The chain broke up, and the new game began.

"And I'm last man—go on. We'll soon find another. Last man out!"

They raced away on either side, the last man between. It was the very place for this game, a gentle slope every way. The last man had no easy task, for the couples agreed, and tried hard to join again.

"Full speed, that's the way!" cried the lookers-on. And the last man put on the pace, rushed towards the meeting-point like a whirlwind, and reached it in time. The girl swung round and dashed off to the left, but made too short a turn, and was caught.

The game went on, growing fast and furious. All were in high spirits, ready to laugh at the slightest thing; every little unexpected turn and twist was greeted with shouts of glee.

Olof was last man now. He stood ready in front of the row, glancing to either side.

"Last pair off!"

The last two were ill-matched; a big broad-shouldered ditcher, and a little slender girl of barely seventeen.

The man lumbered off in a wide curve, the girl shot away like a weasel, almost straight ahead, her red bodice like a streak of flame and her short plait straight out ahead.

"That's it—that's the way!" cried the rest.

The girl ran straight ahead at first, Olof hardly gaining on her at all. Then she tried a zigzag across the grass. Olof took short cuts, increasing his pace and was almost at her heels.

"Now, now!" cried the others behind.

The girl gave a swift glance round, saw her pursuer

already stretching out his hand, and broke away suddenly to one side.

Olof slipped, and went down full length on the grass.

The girl's eyes twinkled mischievously, and a shout of laughter came from the rest.

Olof would have been furious, but he paid no heed to the laughter now, having just at that moment noticed something else. The girl's glance as she turned—heavens, what eyes! And he had never noticed her before. . . .

He sprang up like a rocket and continued the pursuit.

The broad-shouldered partner was making hopeless efforts from the other side of the course. "Don't waste your breath!" cried the men. "He's got her now."

The big fellow stopped, and waited calmly for the end.

But it was not over yet. Olof was gaining steadily on the girl; turn which way she pleased, he would have her now.

She saw the danger, and turned to rush down the slope. But, in turning, one of her shoes came loose, and was flung high in air.

A shout of delight went up from the playground in the rear.

The girl stopped, at a loss now what to do. Olof, too, forgot the pursuit, and stood watching the shoe; then suddenly he sprang forward and caught it in the air as it fell.

A fresh burst of applause came from the lookers-on. "Bravo, bravo, that's the way!"

"Go on, go on! Never mind about the shoe!" cried some of the girls, to urge her on.

She dashed off again, Olof after her with the shoe in his hand.

The chase was worth looking at now; no ordinary game this, but a contest, with victory or defeat at stake. The spectators were wild with excitement, taking sides for one or other of the two.

The girl shot this way and that, like a shuttle in a loom, her slender body gracefully bent, her head thrown back defiantly. Her plait had come loose, and the hair streamed out behind her like a tawny mane. A glimpse of a red stocking showed now and again beneath her dress.

For Olof, too, it had ceased to be a game. She was no longer one of a couple he had to part, but a creature he must tame—a young wild foal with sparkling eyes and golden mane.

They reached the edge of the course; only a few feet now between them.

At last! thought Olof, holding himself in readiness for her next turn up the slope.

But again she turned off downward. And as she wheeled about, Olof again was aware of something he had not marked before—the curve of her hips, her lithe, supple waist, and the splendid poise of her head. He was so close now that her hair touched his face—touched it, or was it only the air as it flew past his cheek? And from her eyes shot beams of light, challenging, beckoning, urging him on.

Gazelle! The word flashed into his mind—a picture from some book he had once read. The eyes, the lightfoot swiftness—yes, a gazelle. He shouted the word aloud, victoriously, as he raced after her like one possessed.

She sprang aside, and darted up a little hill just beyond the course.

"Look, look!" cried the rest. It was like running down a hare.

A glimpse of a red stocking up on the crest of the mound, and the hunted creature vanished on the farther side, the hunter after her.

The final heat was but short. The girl was wearying already, and had made for the shelter of the hill on purpose to avoid being caught in sight of the rest. Olof tore madly down the slope. The girl gave one glance round, turned vaguely with an instinct of defence; next moment she felt Olof's two hands grasping her waist.

"You—gazelle!" he shouted triumphantly. But the pace was too hot for a sudden stop; they lost their balance, and came down together, breast to breast and eye to eye, rolling over on the slope.

It was all like a dream to Olof—he hardly knew what had happened. Only that the girl was lying there across his breast, with her loosened hair streaming over his face. It was like a caress in payment for his exertions, and it almost stifled him. Still holding her, he looked into her flushed face, into her wonderful eyes—Gazelle! He felt like sinking off to sleep, to dream it over again, the charm and wonder of it all . . .

"Oh, but come! The others . . ."

They looked at each other in confusion, and loosed their hold, but were still so agitated they could hardly rise. Olof handed her the shoe.

"Quick—put it on, and we'll go back."

She put on her shoe, but stood still, as if unable to move.

Olof flushed angrily. He was vexed at his own confusion, and with the girl as well.

"Come!" he said commandingly, and gave her his hand. "We must run."

Shouts of applause greeted them as they appeared hand in hand in sight of the rest.

As they came up, Olof felt his senses in a whirl once more, and clenched his teeth in an effort to appear unconcerned.

"Well run, well run!" cried the others.

"Ha ha, Olof, you got the shoe, and the owner, too—but it's made you fine and red."

"Enough to make anyone red," gasped Olof shortly.

"Now, on again! Last man out . . ."

"No, no—don't spoil it now. We shan't get another run like that."

"Yes, that's enough for to-day." Olof's eyes shone, and he stole a glance at the gazelle.

"But we must have a dance before we go," cried the girls.

"A dance, then."

"What do they mean, the two little stars,
That shine in the sky so clearly?
That a boy and a girl, a youth and a maid,
They love each other dearly."

"'Tis a pretty song," thought Olof, and pressed the girl's hand unconsciously, and she did not loose her hold. Then someone led Olof into the ring.

"What do they mean, the four little stars,
That shine so bright in the sky?
That I give my hand to my own true love,
And bid the rest good-bye."

"I've never given a thought to the words before," thought Olof again, and offered his hand to Gazelle.

"What do they mean, the bright little stars,
That shine and sparkle above?
That hope and longing are part of life,
And the rest of life is love."

"All very well," said someone, with a laugh, "but we must be getting home. Some of us have a long way to go."

"Don't break up the party. We'll all go together. One more round first—the last."

"Never shall I leave my love,
Never shall we part.
Rocks may fall, and trees may fall,
And the dark sea come and cover all,
But never shall we part."

"Well, we must part some time—you can cry if you like. Good-bye, good-bye."

And they shook hands all round.

Olof turned toward the girls, where they stood in a group, but was checked by a glance from two deep, honest blue eyes —the fairy of the forest! Her glance was clear and serene as before, but there was something in it that pierced him like a steel. He felt suddenly guilty, and turned pale. He could not move, but stood there fixed by the glance of those blue eyes.

He could not stand there like that. He raised his head to look at the fairy girl, but his glance turned aside, and met another's eyes. These two looked at him, questioning, wondering. And they sent forth such a stream of clear and sparkling light that all else seemed to vanish, and the blood rushed to his cheeks.

"Good-night." He raised his hat to the girls, and turned his back.

The party broke up, all going their several ways.

"Never shall I leave my love,
Never shall we part. . . ."

Some of the young men had crossed the stream already, and were singing as they went. Olof walked up the hill towards his home.

Never shall we part . . ."

—he took up the words half aloud, and his face was set in a strange expression of resolution and eager, almost fierce, delight.

A MOTHER'S EYES

THE warm, soft twilight of a spring night filled the room. And all was still.

"Oh, I have waited for you so!" whispered the girl, flinging her arms round her lover's neck. "I was so afraid you would not come—that something might have happened. . . ."

"And what could happen, and who could keep me from coming to you? But I could not come before—I don't know what it was made mother stay up so late to-night."

"Do you think she . . ." began the girl. But a passionate kiss closed her lips.

"If you only knew how I have been longing for you," said he. "All day I've been waiting for the evening to come. I've thought of nothing else since I first looked into your eyes—Gazelle!"

"Do you mean it, Olof?" She nestled closer to him as she spoke.

"And do you know what I was thinking as I walked behind the plough? I wanted you to be a tiny flower, to put in my breast, so I could see you all the time. Or a sweet apple I could keep in my pocket and fondle secretly—talk to you and play with you and no one ever to know."

"How prettily you talk, Olof!"

"If anyone had told me, I would never have believed love was like this. It's all so strange. Do you know, I want to . . ."

"Yes? Tell me!"

"Crush you to death—like this!"

"Oh, if I could die like that—now, now. . . ."

"No, no—but to crush you slowly, in a long, long kiss."

The twilight quivered in the room. And all was still.

A sound, a creaking noise as of a door in the next room opening.

Two heads were raised from the pillow, two hearts stopped beating.

Again—and more distinctly now—as if someone moved.

He sat up; the girl grasped his hand in fear.

They could hear it plainly now—footsteps, coming nearer. Heavily, hesitatingly, as if not knowing whether to go on or turn back.

Olof was petrified. It was all unreal as a dream, and yet—he knew that step—would know it among a thousand.

"I must go!" He pressed the girl's hand fiercely, and reached hurriedly for his hat. He groped his way toward the door, found the handle, but had not strength to open it.

He strove to pull himself together. He must go—for the sake of the girl who lay trembling there in bed, and more for the sake of her who stood in the room beyond. The door opened and closed again.

An old woman stood there waiting. Motionless as a statue, her wrinkled features set, her eyes full of a pain and bitterness that crushed him like a burden.

For a while neither moved. The woman's face seemed to fade away into the gloom, but the look in her eyes was there still. A sudden tremor, and Olof saw no more, but felt a warm flood welling from beneath his eyelids.

Without a word she turned, and went down the steps. Olof followed her.

With bowed head, and arms hanging loosely at her side, she walked on. The last brief hour seemed to have aged her beyond all knowing.

He felt a violent impulse to run forward and throw himself on his knees in the dust before her. But he dared not, and his feet refused their service.

They came to Kankaala.

The porch seemed glowering at them like a questioning eye as they came up. Olof started, and the blood rushed to his head.

"Who comes here?" queried the porch. "'Tis the mistress of Koskela, or should be. And who is it walks behind, hanging his head? Surely not her son?"

"Ay, 'tis her son, never fear," said the broad window above, grinning all the length of the wall. "The son of the house been seeing his light-o'-love, and his mother brings him home!"

"H'm," said the porch. "'Twas not that mother's way to go seeking her sons, nor ever need of it before."

Olof's head dropped again.

Heavily the old woman trudged up Seppala hill.

"Who's this out and abroad so late?" creaked the wooden pail in its chain above the well. "Mother and son? And what's the mischief now?"

Olof felt the ground quaking beneath his feet.

They were nearly home now. Musti the house-dog came to meet them, wagging his tail in friendly wise. But suddenly it checked, and crouched anxiously in the grass.

"What's mistress all so sorrowful about? And where have you been so late at night?"

Olof turned his head aside, and walked by as if fearing to tread.

They reached the steps.

"What's this, what's this?" buzzed the vane on its pole by the fence. Olof had made it himself one day, as a boy. It said no more, only muttered again, "What's this?"

The old woman mounted the steps. She said no word, nor ever looked behind her, but Olof followed her step by step. His own room was at the side of the house, by the kitchen, but he went on after her without a thought of escape.

She passed through the front room into the next, crossed to the window, and sank down in a chair. Olof followed close behind her, and stood, hat in hand.

There was a long silence.

"I never thought to go on such an errand as this to-night," said the woman heavily. She did not look at him; her eyes seemed fixed on something far away.

The boy's knees trembled, he could hardly stand.

"Shame—ay, 'twas shame I felt for you when you were born, old as I was, and never thinking to have more. Mayhap 'twas a sign you'd bring but shame to me after and all. . . ." The words fell heavy as lead, and brought him to his knees.

"Mother!" He could say no more, but hid his face in her lap, and cried like a child.

A great warmth rose in the mother's breast and throbbed in her veins.

"Mother, I promise—you shall never go that way again for me. And . . . and . . ."

He broke off.

The warmth rose to her eyes, seeking an outlet there.

"And . . .?" she asked gently. "What then, my son?"

The young man's brow was deeply lined, as he strove to speak. Then resolutely he looked up and said, "I will marry her."

"*Marry her?*" An icy wave came over her, and she gasped for breath.

"Olof," she went on in a trembling voice, "look at me. Have you—has anything happened already?" Breathlessly she waited for his answer.

"No," said the boy, and looked her frankly in the eyes. "But I love her."

The mother's hands trembled, and she sighed. But for a long while she said no word, only sat looking as before out into vague distance, as if seeking what to say.

"Ay," she said at last, " 'tis right to marry where you love, and no other. But a servant-girl—there's none of our race ever married that way before. And as for love—you're over young to know."

Olof flushed angrily, and he would have spoken, but the noble dignity of his mother's glance checked the thought ere it was uttered.

"Go now," she said gently. "We will talk of this another time."

FATHER AND SON

THE early meal was over, and the farm hands pressed out through the door.

"You, Olof, stay behind," said the master of Koskela from his seat at the head of the table. "I've a word to say to you."

Olof felt his cheeks tingling. He knew what his father had to say—he had been waiting for this.

The three were alone now—his mother stood by the stove. "Sit down," said the father coldly, from his place.

Olof obeyed. For a while nothing was heard but the slow beat of the clock on the wall.

"I know where your mother was last night. Are you not ashamed?"

Olof bowed his head.

" 'Tis a sound thrashing you should have—and don't be too sure but that you'll have it yet."

Olof did not venture to look up, but the voice told that his father was working himself into a passion.

"What's to come of you, hey, d'you think? Getting the wenches with child to begin with—and what next?"

"Father!" It was his mother's voice. Her face was anxious, as if in dread of coming disaster.

A glance of cold anger was all her husband's answer. He turned to the boy once more, and went on:

"What next, hey? Bring home the brats for us to feed, maybe? Is it that's in your mind?"

A flush of indignation spread over the young man's face. Was this his father, speaking to him thus? Or some brutal stranger that had taken his place?

And all at once a rush of feeling took possession of him, something new and fierce and strange, filling him altogether. He raised his head, as if to speak, but said no word, only rose up, as if someone had taken him by the hand, and walked towards the door.

"Where are you going—what?"

"I've my work to do."

"Ho! You—you . . ." The words were flung at him like a hand reaching for his throat. "Not a step till you've answered me, d'you hear! Was it *that* was in your mind?"

The young man hesitated. But a little time since he had felt himself bowed down with shame, ready to make any reparation; now, in a moment, all seemed changed, he felt he must hit back, must strike one blow for all that had been growing and seething within him in secret these last few days. He turned swiftly, and answered proudly and resolutely, with lifted head:

"No! But to marry her—that was in my mind."

The old man's features set in a scornful sneer at the word. But the look on his son's face made him hesitate, uncertain how to proceed.

"Marry her?" He bent forward in his seat, as if doubting whether he had heard aright.

"Yes!" came the answer, more firmly than before.

And having spoken, Olof felt he must avenge the insult to himself and to the girl, must strike once more with the weapon he had seen could bite so keenly and so deep.

"And marry her *I will!*" The words fell like the snap of a lock.

"Boy—you dare!" It was the roar of a wounded beast. Furiously the old man sprang to the door, snatching up a stick as he rose, seized the boy by the collar, and flung him to his knees on the floor, making the beams shake. It was all done in a moment. "You dare!" he cried again, raising his stick.

Then suddenly his arm dropped as if broken, and the old man was hurled across the room as a ball is thrown, to fall with a crash against the opposite wall.

It was as if a hurricane had burst upon him. A sense of horror came upon him; he felt himself deposed, like a lord of the manor declared bankrupt before his underlings. He had no power over the boy now—either as a father or as the stronger man. And there by the door stood the lad, with the lithe strength of youth in his body and a fire of defiance in his eyes.

The clock on the wall beat through the silence, as if questioning earnestly what this might mean. But no one answered.

"So—that's it, is it?" gasped the father at last.

"Ay!" answered the son, his voice trembling with emotion, but threatening still.

The old man flung his stick in a corner, stepped back, and sat down heavily in his place.

"If you've a drop of my blood in your veins," he said at last, "you'll need no telling what must be the end of this."

"I know it," was the answer. "I'm going, never fear."

The mother pressed her clasped hands tighter, took a step forward and opened her lips as if to speak, but the look on

the two men's faces silenced her, and she fell back in the voiceless blank of unaccomplished purpose.

Again the clock was heard.

"I'd thought to make something of you," said the old man in icy tones. "But you'd no fancy for book-learning and gentlefolks' ways, though you'd a good head enough. Rather stick to the land, you would, and flung away the books after a year of them. But a man that looks to work his land as it should be—he's books of his own, or what's the same—and that you must fling away now the same gait, it seems—to waste yourself in a common strumpet's bed!"

The young man drew himself up, and his eyes flashed fire.

"Leave it unsaid!" cried his father. "'Tis best so." Then rising from his seat, he stood a moment as if in thought, and passed through the open door to the next room, opened a cupboard there and took something out.

"No son of mine goes out from this house a beggar," said he proudly, and held out his hand.

"You can put the money back," said the boy, with no less pride.

"'Tis but poor provision for a journey, anyway, if a man can't manage for himself," he added, turning away.

His father stood still, looking at him earnestly, as if trying to read something.

"'Tis no harm to a man to manage for himself if he can," said he slowly. He spoke in no angry tone, but with a stern approval.

The boy stood thinking for a moment.

"Good-bye, father."

His father did not answer, but stared fixedly before him, and his eyes hardened.

His mother had seated herself on a bench beside the window, her face turned away, looking out—and warm drops fell on the sill.

The young man moved towards her slowly, as if questioning. She turned towards him, and their eyes met—then they passed out of the room together.

The old man remained seated, a sharp pain at his breast. A flush of anger rose to his cheeks, and his lips trembled, but he could not speak, and sat still, staring at the floor.

In the next room, the mother turned anxiously to her son, and grasped his hand. "Olof!"

"Mother!" The boy was trembling. And fearing to lose control of his feelings, he went on hastily: "Mother, I know, I know. Don't say any more."

But she took both his hands in hers, and looked earnestly into his eyes.

"I must say it—I couldn't before. Olof—you are your father's son, and 'tis not your way, either of you, to care much what you do—if it's building or breaking." And with intense earnestness, as if concentrating all her being in her eyes and voice, she went on: *"Never deceive, Olof; stand by your promise and word to all—whatever their station."*

The boy pressed her hands with emotion, almost in fear, unable to speak a word.

"God keep you safe from harm, my son." The mother's voice broke. "Don't forget this is your home. Come back when, when . . ."

The boy pressed her hands once more, and turned hastily away. He must go now, if he would have the strength to go at all.

PANSY

THE clouds raced over the night sky; the river-banks gazed at the flowing water, at the heavy timber floating slowly over its surface. "Let it come!" cried the long stretch of wild rapids below.

Under the lee of a steep bank, just at the point where the eddy begins, flickered a small camp-fire. The lumbermen sat round it—four of them there were. The boom had just been drawn aside, the baulks from above came floating down in clean rows, needing no helping hand, and for the past two hours there had been no block in the river. The lumbermen were having an easy time to-night.

"The farmer he sleeps in a cosy cot,
With a roof above his head;
The lumberman lies out under the stars,
With the dew to soften his bed.
But we'd not change our life so free
For all the farmer's gold,
Let clodhoppers snore at their ease o' nights,
But we be lumbermen bold!"

The river woke from its dreams.

The river-guard, seated on piles of baulks by the water-side, shifted a little.

"But we be lumbermen bold!"

cried the nearest. And the song was passed on from one point to another, from shore to shore, all down the rapids, to the gangs below.

Then all was silent again, for midnight loves not song, though it does demand a call from man to man through the dark. It loves better to listen, while the river tells of the dread sea-monster that yearly craves a human life, whether grown or child, but always a life a year.

All things solemn and still now. The moon sits quiet as if in church, and jesting dies on the roughest lips. Many call to mind things seen at such a time—a man drawn down by an invisible grasp, to rise no more, a widow wringing her hands and wailing, fatherless children crying and sobbing. Some there are who have seen the marks of the water-spirits on a drowned man's body, or maybe seen the thing itself rise up at midnight, furrowing the water with a gleam of light where it moves. Whose turn next? None can say, but the danger is never far off.

The little camp-fire flickered, the roar of the rapids grew fainter. The moon sits listening to the legends of the river, and gazing down into the water.

Suddenly a great shout is heard from below. The men start up.

"Lock in, lock in! Close the boom!" comes the cry.

A murmur of relief from the men. Wakened abruptly from the spell of the hour, they had taken the hail at first for a cry of distress. They race up, lifting their poles above their heads as a sign the fairway is blocked, and the word of command, "Lock in, lock in!" is flung from man to man along the bank.

"Lock in it is!" cries the man at the head, and runs from the camp-fire down to the waterside. The rope is slipped, the end of the boom hauled close up to the shore and made fast again.

"'Twill hold a bit," says one. "But like to be a long spell for us all—for there's none'll care to get far out on the block to-night, if it lasts. Let's go down and see."

The party made their way down the path by the edge of the bank.

As the last of the timber comes down, the guards by the rapids join them, one after another. "Where'll it be?"

"Down below somewhere, must be. If only it's not the Whirlstone again."

"Ay, if it's that . . . 'Tis no light work to get loose there in the daytime, let alone by night."

The Whirlstone Rock it was; the baulks had gathered about it in an inextricable mass. The shores were dark with men gathered to watch.

"Ay, 'tis there, sure enough, and fast as nails," said the men coming in to the shore, after a vain attempt at breaking loose the block.

The Whirlstone was a point of rock, rising barely a yard above the surface of the water, at the lower end of the rapids, where the river began to widen out and clear. It lay rather to the right of the fairway, and the timber floated clear, for the most part, to the left of it. But a long stem bringing up against it broadside on would be checked, and others packing against it form a fan-shaped mass reaching from bank to bank. And it was a dangerous business to try and break it, for the point of contact was at the rock itself out in the river, and there was no time to reach the bank once the timber started to spread. The usual way was to get out a boat from below, and even then it was a race for life to get clear before the loosened mass came roaring down.

The foreman swore aloud. "I'll have that cursed rock out of the fairway next summer, if I have to splinter it. Well, there's nothing for it now; get your coffee, lads, and wait till it's light."

"Let's have a look at it first," cried a young, brisk voice in the crowd. "Maybe we could get it clear."

"There's no clearing that in the dark," said the foreman. "Try, if you like."

The young man sprang out on to the nearest point of the block, and leaped across actively, with lifted pole, to the middle. Reaching there, he bent down to see how the jam was fixed.

"Hallo!" came a hail from the rock. "It's easy enough. There's just one stick here holding it up—a cut of the axe'll clear it."

"Ho!" cried the men ashore. "And who's to cut it loose, out there in the dark and all?"

"Get a rope and haul it clear!" shouted the foreman.

"No use—can't be done that way."

The young man came ashore. "Mind if I lose the axe?" he asked the foreman.

"Lose a dozen and welcome, if you can get it clear. Better than losing two hours' work for fifteen men."

"Right. Give me an axe, somebody."

" 'Tis fooling with death," cried one in the crowd. "Don't let him go."

"How d'you reckon to get back?" asked the foreman.

"Upstream at first, and come down after, when it clears."

" 'Tis a mad trick," muttered the men.

"I'm not telling him to go, but I won't forbid him," said the foreman, with emphasis. "And if 'twas any other man

I'd not let him try, but when Olof says he'll do a thing it's safe enough to be done. Sure you can do it, lad?"

"Sure as can be. Where's the axe?"

He took the axe, and his pole, and balanced his way across to the rock, gliding like a shadow, up and down as the piled stems led.

"He's pluck enough," said one.

"He's mad to try it," murmured some of the others sullenly.

The shadow had reached the rock. He laid the pole down at his feet, gave one glance upstream, and stood ready. The axe-head flashed in the air, the echo of the stroke rang from the steep banks. A second blow, and a third—and then dead silence for a moment.

The men on the shore stood bending forward, straining their eyes to see.

The shadow by the rock stood up, grasping his pole, thrust the point lightly into one of the tangled baulks, and pressed with his left hand against the haft. The right hand went up once more, the axe flashed and fell. A thud as the blade came down, and a faint rushing sound. . . .

The men on the bank held their breath and leaned forward again.

The shadow turned once more and cast a long, searching glance up the stream. The right arm swung high, the axe flashed again. . . .

A shrill, seething roar, like that of a rocket, was heard. The mass of timber crashed and groaned, the water thundered like a beast in fury.

The shadow darted like an arrow over the shifting logs, slanting upstream and towards the shore. He was half

across the fairway now, the pole swung round, the lithe body made a lightning turn, and he was borne downstream at a furious pace.

Suddenly he lost his footing, fell, and disappeared.

"Good God!" cried the men.

"What did I say?"

"I ought never to have let him go!"

The timber crashed and the water roared, the great logs rose and fell and tumbled one over another. Dark shadows hurried aimlessly hither and thither on the banks.

"Downstream, lads, down!" cried the foreman. "Ready to give a hand if he's carried inshore. Out with the boat, quick!"

Shadows hurrying downstream. . . .

"He's up again!" came a sudden shout from the farther shore. All stopped.

And true enough, the daring lumberman was up again, hopping like a bird from one racing log to another as they thrust and elbowed their way down the rapids, rising and falling as in a loom. Then he settled to the practised lumberman's easy poise on a log, and steered his way, with lifted pole and carefully balanced body, out of the rapids.

"Well done, well done!"

"Ay, that's the sort. More eyes in his feet than many another in his head."

They crowded thickly round the lad as he stepped ashore.

"What happened? How did you get up again?"

" 'Twas easy enough. Only the bark broke away under foot, the sticks themselves held fast. I was up again

in a second—and the last part was worth it all," said the boy, with a laugh.

"'Twas finely done," said the foreman. "But I don't want to see it done again. You've done enough for to-night—go off and get a rest, and to-morrow too, if you like."

"Thanks," said the young man, looked at his watch with a sly chuckle, and flung down his pole on the grass.

. . . . . .

Behind white curtains in a little room lay a young girl. It was midnight, yet she had not slept. Something had happened that evening which kept her awake.

Strange—it was like a story or a dream; she had never heard of such a thing happening to any she knew. And now—she had only to shut her eyes, and it was there all over again, to the very life.

She had seen it that way many times already, till it was grown to something like a story. She had watched it happening, standing by, as it were, a looker-on, watching what passed between the girl there and one other.

She was standing in the front room—the girl, that is—pouring the warm milk through a big strainer.

"They're giving more milk already," thinks the girl, and laughs.

Then suddenly the door opens, and a crowd of lumbermen come hurrying through the room, going out to their night's work. The girl stands with her back turned to them as they pass, answering over her shoulder the jests of the men as they go.

But the one that was last of all—he did not go on with the rest, but stayed, as if in wonder, looking at her. A tall, slender lad. His jacket was unbuttoned, his cap a

trifle on one side, and a mischievous expression played about his sunburnt face.

But the girl sees nothing, thinking the men have gone. And she, the looker-on, finds it strange that the girl should not see. . . . What is going to happen now?

Then the young man smiles, and steals forward noiselessly—the looker-on is all excitement now, and on the point of crying out to warn her.

Two hands reach out from behind and close gently over the girl's eyes.

"Oh!" screams the girl. "Who is it? How dare you!" And with a scream she turns and sees him standing there.

"Good evening," says the young man, laughing, and raising his cap. And the looker-on notes how the girl only blushes and makes no answer.

"Did I frighten you?" he goes on. "I meant no harm, I'm sure."

"'Tis no matter," says the girl. "I was only startled for a moment."

"And you're not angry now?"

"Nay; why should I be? For a jest?"

"That's right. I felt directly I saw you as if we were old friends—only I couldn't remember your name, so I thought I'd just stop and ask."

Oh, but 'tis a handsome lad—and such a smile, thinks the girl looking on.

"Pansy, they call me," says the other girl shyly, "but . . ."

"Say no more," the young man breaks in. "Pansy, they call you—'tis enough for me."

Surely then the name must be a good one, since he seems to like it so, thinks the girl looking on.

"And you . . . ?" asks the girl. "You're a stranger, I think."

"Stranger?" cries the young man, with a laugh that echoes through the room. "Couldn't you feel it was a friend and no 'stranger' when my hands closed over your eyes?" And he looks at her with such irresistible friendliness as he speaks, that she cannot but smile—and the girl looking on smiles too.

"Olof's my name—and no stranger, if you please."

After that he seemed to be thinking for a moment, then suddenly he asks, "Are you fond of flowers, Pansy?"

"Yes, indeed. And I've two of my own—a fuchsia and a balsamine," answers the girl.

"Red flowers both! And do you keep them in your window?"

"Where else should they be?"

"And can you see them from outside?"

"Indeed you can, now they're in bloom."

"And where is your window, then?" says he, with a sly little gleam in his eyes. "Tell me, so I can see them too when I pass."

The girl opens her lips to answer, but checks herself suddenly. "Nay, I'll not tell!"

Oh, but how cunning of him, thinks the looker-on. Never was such a sly one. Anyone else would just have asked straight out where she slept. And then of course the girl would have been offended at once. But this young man—he says never a word of anything but flowers.

"In the parlour?" he asks, with a laugh.

"No!"

"Up in the loft, then?"

"No, nor there."

"Then it's the little room at the back."

"No, no!" cries the girl, all confused. "Not there, indeed it's not."

The young man laughs. "I can't guess any more. But it's cruel of you not to tell."

And there again, mark the slyness of him, thinks the girl looking on. Anyone else would have laughed out loud and said, "Now, I know!" and the girl would have blushed.

"Well, we're friends now, real friends, aren't we?" says he, after a while.

" 'Tis early yet, for sure. But if so, what then?"

"Why, I was but thinking—if we were friends, I'd ask you—no, I won't ask yet."

"You can ask if you like, 'twill do no harm," says the girl, curious to hear.

"Only this—if anyone has ever—ever pressed your hand."

"No," says the girl, with a blush. "I'd never let them."

There again, so neatly put, thinks the looker-on. And how nice and frank and handsome he looks.

"Now, I wonder if that's true," says he. "But I'll soon see. Give me your hand a minute."

"What for?"

"Oh, I can read it, and find out all sorts of things."

"You?"

"Yes. Don't believe it? But you dare not try."

"Ho! Dare not, indeed!" And she gives him her hand.

Now what's going to happen, thinks the looker-on.

"H'm. It's true, by the look of things," says the young man seriously. "No one has ever pressed your hand. But

down there under the window—there's more than one that's stopped to look at your flowers."

"How do you—— Oh, you don't know really, you're making it all up."

"Sh! I'm telling your fortune. Listen! But what's this I see? Well, I'd never have thought . . ."

"What—what is it?" asks the girl anxiously.

"What it is I dare not say. Only I'd never have thought it."

"Oh—you only say that because you can't find anything proper to say at all."

"Shall I tell you what it is, then?" asks he, looking her straight in the eyes.

"Yes—if you can."

"Right. But you mustn't be angry if I do." His voice falls to a whisper. "Look—look there! He's coming—this very night!"

"He—who?" asks the girl uneasily.

"He—the one that you've been waiting for—the one that is to—press your hand."

"It's not true!" cries the girl. "I'll never let him!"

"Sh! I can only say what it says there. He will *come*, be sure of that. At midnight, or thereabouts. And he will not beg and pray and ask as the others do, only knock at your window three times, softly, but firmly—and then you'll know it's the right one, and no other. . . . But now I must go. Good-night, Pansy."

And with a wave of his cap he hurries out.

And she—the one that is looking on—marks how the girl stands all confused for a while, and then goes softly to the door, watching him till he is out of sight.

The story is ended—the girl opens her eyes.

And ended, too, the pleasant self-forgetfulness with which she had watched the scene as acted by another—in place of it come doubts and questionings out of the dark.

"What shall I do if he comes—what shall I do?"

Already she seemed to hear footsteps outside, her heart beat so violently, she pressed her hand to her breast. And it was a relief when no one came after all, and she hoped and hoped he would not come at all, to spoil the pretty fairy story.

"But then—if he should not come? If he had been only jesting, after all." That was worse still. "If he would only come—but only to the window—look in at the flowers, but not to knock three times, no. . . ."

She went back to the beginning again—a girl stood in the front room, pouring warm milk through a big strainer. . . .

A knocking at the window—three soft, short taps.

The girl sat up with a start, holding her breath. She raised her head, and looked anxiously toward the window. The fuchsia and the balsamine gazed at her from the sill with questioning eyes: "What is this you are doing, Pansy?"

And behind the flowers was a dark shadow, against the blind. She *felt* that he was looking straight through at her: "I am here, Pansy."

The shadow seemed calling her to account for something she had promised. She hid her face in the pillow, and pulled the quilt over her head. Her heart throbbed till the bed itself seemed to shake.

"And he will not beg and pray and ask, as the others do."

Slowly the girl drew herself up and remained sitting on the edge of the bed, her hands in her lap.

"If he would only knock again, and give mē time to think—to think. . . ."

The dark shadow did not move, the fuchsia and the balsamine stood breathless.

Quietly she slipped to the floor and stepped forward doubtfully a pace or two. There was a movement of the shadow; the girl trembled, and caught at the bedpost for support.

The shadow stopped at once, and stood as before, calling her to account.

With eyes cast down, she moved again towards the door —slowly, hesitatingly, as if her heart were willing, but her limbs refused. She could feel the shadow gliding round outside to the doorway. Her heart throbbed as if it would burst; her fingers grasped feverishly at the latch.

Then slowly, silently, the latch was raised; the girl fled to the corner by the stove, and stood there covering her face with her hands.

The door opened, closed again, and the latch was pressed down firmly.

"Where are you, Pansy, little friend? Is it you there in the corner?"

He crossed over to her, and took both her hands in his.

"Hiding your face, and trembling . . .?" He looked steadily at her.

"I will go away in a moment," he said gently, as if asking forgiveness. "I never thought you would feel it so."

"No, no!" said the girl anxiously. "It wasn't that. . . ."

"Get into bed again and cover yourself up, or you'll be

cold. And I'll sit beside you a little, just while it's dark, and then go again."

Shy and confused, she sprang into bed and drew the clothes over her.

He looked at her a moment. Then pulling up a chair beside the bed, he sat down, resting one elbow on the pillow.

"Pansy, why do you hide your eyes? Are you afraid? Is it because I am here? Give me your hand. Who was it that was to press your hand? Do you remember?

"Didn't you know I was coming? Hasn't the cuckoo been saying it all the spring? Didn't the daisies tell you he was to come this summer? And now, now that I am here, you look at me as if I were a stranger. Is it because it has come true so suddenly?"

She pressed his hand. "Oh, you are not like the others."

"And how should I be? You did not care for them. The one you have been waiting for—was he to be like them? Answer, dark-eyed Pansy-flower."

She clasped his wrist with both her hands, and drew herself closer to him.

"And I have been waiting," he whispered tenderly, "for whom, do you think? For one of the others? I have seen more than I can count—but the moment I saw you, I knew who it was you were waiting for, and who it was I sought."

The girl moved uneasily. There was a sound of footsteps outside, and shadows moved behind the curtains of the window.

"Oh!" she whispered, shrinking in fear.

"Is that some of them?" asked the young man calmly.

"Yes. Oh, hide yourself, hide somewhere—they light matches outside sometimes, and look in."

"I'll not move a step for any of them," he said resolutely, folding his arms. "Don't be afraid, little one, there's nothing to fear."

A dark shadow climbed up outside. There was a scraping sound, and a light shone into the room for a moment.

"There he is—sitting there as if he was master of the house!" The shadow sprang down again.

A low murmur was heard outside, and footsteps receding.

A moment later, the whispering voices were heard again, and steps approaching. Then something heavy was flung against the door with a crash.

"There! Sleep well, my dears!" cried a scornful voice outside. A chorus of laughter followed, the footsteps died away, and all was still.

The young man rose to his feet. "The brutes!" he muttered, trembling with anger. He sprang to the door, lifted the latch, and threw his weight against it. The door did not move. His blood boiled, and again he flung himself against the door. It creaked under the shock, but the bar outside held fast.

"I heard who it was, anyhow," he said significantly. "I'll have a word to say to some of them to-morrow."

"Oh," cried the girl, "now everyone will know—and we can't even get out now."

"Don't be afraid, dear. If one way's barred, I'll soon find another."

He walked to the window, and pressed hard against the frame. The nails gave way, and the woodwork hung loose.

"There! We can get out that way now. I'll take care

of the flowers—and I'll see those fellows hold their tongues —never fear."

Self-possessed and smiling, he came back to the bedside. "You poor little thing, so easily scared! Not afraid now, are you?"

"No—not now you're here again."

"Why," said he gaily, "don't you see? It had to come like this—or else—it would have been just like—any of the others!"

They both laughed, and the girl looked up at him through her tears. A faint light of dawn showed through from without.

"And you haven't heard it all yet. I'll tell you—it's all different from anything else—right from the beginning. I came here a way you'd never dream—by way of the river, and past the jaws of death."

"What—what do you mean?"

And he told her what had passed among the rapids that night, when the floating timber jammed against the Whirlstone Rock.

"And then we get locked in here, to make it unlike anything else all through. And that's how I love you, Pansy—so that I have to come to you through the rapids at night, and stay with you behind barred doors. But *are* you mine, my own? You haven't said so yet."

"Am I? Oh, Olof, how can you ask!" And she twined her arms lovingly round his neck.

. . . . . .

The growing flush of dawn stole through the curtains, spreading a faint gleam of rose on the girl's white arms.

"Red—red is all that is beautiful in the world," nodded the fuchsia to the balsamine.

. . . . . .

The sun rose over the far-curving slopes on either side of the river, filled his lungs with the freshening coolness of the night, and drank his morning cup of glistening dew. A light mist still hung over the river-bed.

Olof strode down the slope with easy step, his heart swelling with joy.

Down on the shore below the rapids stood a group of men, young fellows from the village, who came down at times to earn a little extra by keeping watch over the timber at night.

Olof cast his eyes over the group, and his pleasant feeling of contentment vanished. He felt himself weighed down as by a burden. But a little while since, he had lifted the heavy beam they had set against the door of a girl's room, and carried it back to the barn, the weight seeming as nothing to him in his gladness. But now . . .

"A single word, a look, would be enough. But if they just go on as if nothing had happened—what can I do?"

A dark flush burned in his cheeks as he approached the group; he glanced about him guardedly under his brows.

The men made no sign.

Olof picked up his pole from the grass, and began slowly wiping off the dew, eyeing the men watchfully as he did so.

They stood about, apparently unconcerned.

He bit his lips. Was he to let it pass off like this?

He walked past them, with a burning glance.

As he did so, a low laugh was heard on the edge of the group.

Next moment came the sound of a heavy blow, and the jester measured his length on the grass.

"You—what's that for? Who d'you think you are, young devil's brat, what?" Two men came at him with a rush.

Olof gripped the first by the collar and crutch, and flung him head foremost through the air. Then, taking the other as swiftly, he lifted him high overhead, and threw him down like a crumpled rag.

"You swine—you filthy brutes!" His voice quivered with rage, his eyes burned like fire, and he raised his clenched fists threateningly. "Come on, the lot of you; I've more to settle with you yet."

There was an angry murmur from the crowd, but it died away as a calm, manly voice spoke up:

"Seems to me, young man, you've settled fairly enough already for a bit of fun and no harm meant. And if you're as good a man as I take you for, you'll see yourself 'twas not done the way you seem to take it. We've all been sort of proud of that little lass, and till now there's never one of us passed through her door, though there's many that would if they could. And when a bit of a chap from God knows where comes along, and he's found sitting in there like her lord and master . . ."

"And what's that to you?" Olof stepped forward threateningly.

"Quiet, lad, you've no call to shout," went on the other calmly. "I'm not meaning to quarrel with you. We've known that girl, I say, since we were youngsters together, and you're a stranger here. And it's like to do her harm. Leave her alone, I say, and don't go making her a by-

word in folk's mouths, for the sake of one that comes and goes so light and easy as you."

"Stranger, you say?" Olof crossed his arms defiantly. "You know who I am well enough. And you're the men to talk of a girl's honour to me—you that hang about outside her window at night—a nice lot to protect her! Mark my words, the lot of you. I go where I please, if 'twas to a princess in a palace. And I'll go the way I went last night as long as I'm here in the place. And as sure as I stand here, if one of you shows his head outside that window, or dares to say a coarse word—ay, or so much as a look to hurt her, I'll thrash him till he can't stand on his feet."

He turned and walked proudly up the hill. The men gazed after him without a word.

AT SUNRISE

"THE loveliest hour?" said the fuchsia warmly. "Why, now, give me the night—'tis the best of all."

"I love it too," answered the balsamine. "Whispering here as we are now, alone in the dark, only knowing the other is near, only seeing the gleam of each other's eyes. But the morning, too, is beautiful—at sunrise, when the dew-drops glisten and the leaves quiver in the wakening breeze."

"True, that is true. All times are beautiful, all life. The morning, when the cock crows, and the birds twitter, and the children newly washed come out to play in the yard. The day, too, when the sunbeams dance over the floor, and the haymakers come from the fields, with sweat on their brows, home to the midday meal. And the evening, when the shadows lengthen, and the cows come home, with their bells tinkling along the fringe of the wood. But there's nothing can compare with night—'tis at night we find ourselves, and only then."

"Find ourselves . . .?" echoed the balsamine. "Ah, yes, I understand. . . ."

"Ourselves—and that faint song of the heart that is never heard in the bright fulness of day," the fuchsia went on. "All day we belong to the world, sharing all things in common, having nothing of our own. But when the night falls, then our own time is near. Softly it steals through the forest, patiently waits in a corner within doors, trembles

mysteriously in the air, and wakes to life all that has slept in us through the day. It comes to us with a soft glow, in a swooning fragrance of flowers. All things else are sleeping, none are astir save those. . . ."

A woman's arm showed faintly white through the gloom.

"All save those . . .?" whispered the balsamine.

"Save those who find themselves and waken into bloom."

. . . . . .

"Pansy—my wonderful delight—my love! You are like the night—witching, ensnaring, all the mystery of a summer night, when the summer lightning gleams."

"I never knew till now what youth is, what love is. Great and beautiful, coming like a king in a golden chariot, beckoning, calling, leading us on."

"Why are you trembling, love? And your hands are hot, and your eyes—what are they saying?"

"I don't know—it's very hot. No, no, it's only that I'm too happy. . . ."

"Too happy?"

"No, no. I don't know what it is. Only I wish . . ."

"What is it? Tell me."

"I can't—I don't know what it is. I . . ."

"But tell me—can't you tell me what it is?"

"I can't say it. I—I'm frightened."

"Frightened? Why—have I frightened you?"

"You?—no, how could you? Only . . ."

"Tell me, then. Tell me. Only a word, and I shall know."

"I'm frightened—no, I can't say it. Only—— Oh, I love you, if you knew how I love you. . . ."

. . . . . .

"The loveliest hour I ever knew," whispered the balsamine again, "was when I bloomed for the first time—when my petals opened, and the sun came and kissed right into my heart."

"I know, I know," murmured the fuchsia. "And I that am blooming now for the second time—should I not know? We put forth flowers again, and it is always sweet, but never like the first time of all—nothing can ever be like that. For it is all a mystery then; the mantle of something wonderful and unknown is over us. And we feel it and thrill at what is coming, and ask ourselves—will it be to-day? Hoping and fearing—and knowing all the time that it will come. Never a thought of past or future, only for the hour that is upon us . . . until at last it comes, it comes—petals that blush and unfold, and all things else seem to fade away, and we melt into a glory of warmth and light."

. . . . . .

The Spirit of Joy stood quietly smiling by the bed.

The girl's loose hair flowed like black silk over the pillow; his head was resting there.

They held each other's hands and looked deep into each other's eyes. The Spirit of Joy had stood there long, but had not heard them speak a word—only seen them lying there in silence, smiling tenderly to each other.

The sun rose slowly over the ridge of hills, but once clear of the summit its rays shot suddenly down across the intervening landscape, in through the window.

The girl looked up; the sun was laughing full in her eyes.

She sat up in bed, as if waking from a deep sleep; all things seemed strange and unexpected.

"Has the sun eyes too, I wonder? . . . Has it been watching me all these mornings?" . . .

. . . . . .

After a little while she raised her head, and looked up shyly once more.

The sun was watching her with a great questioning glance —as a mother looks when she does not speak, but questions with her eyes alone.

The girl felt a shock, as if the blood had ceased to flow in her veins; she cast down her eyes, and looked up no more. Two great pearly tears quivered on her lashes.

"What is it?" asked her lover in dismay, half rising in his turn. "What is it, Pansy?" He pressed her tenderly to him. "Why are your eyes cast down?"

The teardrops trembled a moment and fell; the girl turned, and hid her face in the pillow.

"Pansy, oh, my love!" he whispered, filled with a burning desire to comfort her.

The girl's bare shoulders quivered, and her breast heaved with suppressed sobs.

It was like a cold iron through his soul—as if he had been soaring in the bluest heights, to fall now, broken-winged, among sharp rocks, hearing sounds of misery on every side.

Heavily he threw himself down beside her, and hid his face in her dark hair.

Two children of men, with shoulders heaving and faces wet with tears. . . . The room seemed full of their sighing.

The sun turned away and hid his darkened face.

"It is sorrow," whispered the fuchsia, and a red tear fell on the window-sill below.

. . . . . .

And yet beneath the veil of sorrow showed a warm red glow—the great secret that was between them. It was as if their eyes were opened, and they saw each other truly for the first time—no longer a youth and a maiden, but two human creatures thrilled with sorrow and joy in the pale dawn.

. . . . . .

"Can you ever forgive me?" he asked, his voice trembling.

"Forgive . . .?" echoed the girl, and threw her arms round his neck.

"And you will not think of me with bitterness?" he asked again.

"How could I ever think of you with bitterness—you who have been everything to me? But why must you go away now?"

"Ay, why must we say good-bye now?" said he, with a sigh, as if hardly knowing what he said.

"If you only knew how I shall miss you . . ."

"And if *you* knew. . . . O Heaven! But what can I do?"

"Don't be unhappy for my sake; I know you can do nothing to change it. And how can I ask more of you, after all you have given me? If only I could see you again some time; only once, once even after many years—if I only could . . ."

"Perhaps I may come one day—just to see you . . ."

"Come, come! I shall wait for you week after week."

. . . . . .

Slowly he drew out his watch, looked at it, and showed it to the girl.

"Yes, you must go now. But how can I ever let you go?"

"How can I ever go? Oh, if only it were always night, and day never to come!"

"Yes—the last, long night—and after that the Judgment. I should not fear it now. Only a minute—only a minute more. One more look—there—and now I can never forget."

"Pansy, Pansy," he murmured tenderly. But his breast heaved with distress—it was as if the latch had been torn from the door, leaving it open to all who cared. "One thing you must promise me—after this. . . ." His voice was like that of a drowning man. "Never to care for any other but the one you choose some day, for life."

"How should I ever care for any other?" said the girl wonderingly. "And even then I shall love you just the same—even then."

"No, no, no! It would be worse than all. When you choose for life you must give all your love."

"No need to tell me that," said the girl in a low voice that thrilled him with pleasure and yet heightened his fears.

"Promise me! You don't know why I ask you, why I beg of you to promise that. It is not for my own sake," he urged.

"I promised you that long ago—the first time we ever met," said the girl, and cowered close to him.

They drew apart, and stood up.

Holding him by the hand, she followed him to the door. Then flinging her arms about his neck, she clung to him

as if she would never let him go. He took her in his arms, himself on the point of swooning; he felt her hair wet with tears against his cheek, and their lips met.

The girl's head was bent back, looking, not into his eyes as before, but upward. And he saw how the look in her eyes changed, first to ineffable tenderness, then to pious prayer—until it seemed freed from all earth, gazing at some blessed vision afar off. As long as she stood thus he could not move a limb. Then her eyelids quivered, closed—and she drew her lips away.

He looked at them, saw a white, bloodless line—and he felt in that moment as if some ineradicable, eternal seal had been pressed upon his own.

"I can't leave you like this!" he cried desperately. "Look! To-night we shall be at Kirveskallio—I can come from there. And I will come every night as long as we are within reach."

The girl's face lit with a pale gleam as of autumn sunlight, but she said no word. Only looked at him strangely, as he had never seen her look before—and stood there, gazing at him still, as he passed out.

ROWAN

ROWAN—do you know why I call you so?" he asked, holding the girl's hand clasped in his.

"It must have been because I blushed so when you spoke to me first," she answered shyly.

"No, no! Guess again."

"I can't guess, I'm sure. I never thought why it was—only that it was a pretty name, and nice of you to call me so."

"Did you think I should give you an ugly name?" said the young man, with a laugh. "But there's much in that name, if you only knew."

"Perhaps I know." She looked at him trustingly as she spoke.

"Not altogether. But never mind—I'll tell you some of it, though. See, this last spring was all so wonderful to me, somehow, and I was happy just to be alive. But then came the summer, and autumn: the grass began to wither, and the leaves turned yellow, and it made my heart ache to see."

"You weren't happy last summer?" she asked tenderly.

"No. You see, I could not forget the spring that had been so wonderful, and I was longing for it all the time. If I'd stayed in the same place, then perhaps . . . But I'm a wanderer, once and for all . . ."

"Why do you never stay anywhere?"

"'Tis my nature, I suppose," he answered, staring before him.

"And where were you—that time?" asked the girl timidly, watching his face.

"Oh, a long way off. Don't ask of that. I'm not thinking of that spring now any more. It was only to tell you—who it was showed me that the autumn can be lovely, too."

"Did someone show you that?"

"Yes, someone showed me—or, rather, I saw it the moment I set eyes on her."

He took the girl's hands in his, and looked into her eyes.

"It was a little cluster of rowan berries. When I saw you, you were like a young red rowan on the hillside. The birch was fading already, the ash stood solemn and dull, but you were there with the red berries, calling to me—no, not calling, but I saw you. And I stood and looked as if a miracle had come, and said to myself, should I speak to her, or just go by?"

"If you had just gone by . . ."

"I thought of going by—seeing I'm one that has no right ever to stay. . . . I couldn't see if it was right to stop and look at you."

"Now I don't quite understand."

"You can't understand it at all—'twas only something I was trying to think out myself. . . . But I did stop and look—and 'tis thanks to that I've had this lovely autumn, after all."

"And I, too," whispered the girl.

"Yes, thanks to you, I have learned that autumn can be beautiful as well; lovelier even than the spring—for the

autumn is cooler, calmer, and gentler than the spring. And it was then I learned for the first time what it is that makes life beautiful—what it is that human beings seek."

The girl has slipped down to the ground, and sat now looking up at him, resting her arms on his knees.

"Tell me more—more about that. It's so pretty to hear, and I understand it all, though I could never say it that way myself."

"Yes, you know, and all know, that there is nothing beautiful in life but that one thing—and all of us live for that, and nothing else. Without that we have only our hands and work for them, our teeth and food for them; but, when that comes, all is changed. You have seen yourself, and felt, how it changes everything."

"Oh, have I not! How could I help it?"

"How sad faces learn to smile, and eyes to speak, and how we learn a new tongue altogether. Even the voice is changed, to a silvery ring. All the world is changed, to something lovelier—and we ourselves grow beautiful beyond words."

"Yes, yes—Olof, how wonderful of you! It is all like a beautiful dream."

"Do you remember the time when you first began to care for me?"

"I shall always remember that time—always."

"It was pretty to watch—how you blushed and paled, and blushed again, and never knew which way to turn your eyes, and your heart throbbed, and you never dared confess even to yourself what made it so. I watched you then, and I found myself wishing you might not see me at all, only that I might watch you for ever from some secret place."

"Oh, but you don't know how it hurt, all the same—how anxious I was all the time—I could not have borne it long, I know."

"Yes—I understand. . . . And you were more beautiful still when you opened your heart to me. I read in your eyes as in an open book, and it made life bright and beautiful again for me."

"I—I have done nothing at all . . ." said the girl, blushing, and looking down. But she raised her head again, laid one hand on his knee, and looked questioningly at him.

He laughed in reply.

Slowly she drew herself up into his embrace, and put her arms about his neck.

"May I sit here like this?"

"Yes, you may—like this," said he, slipping an arm round her waist.

The girl's face drew nearer to his own, still questioning.

"No, no," he murmured, and laid one hand gently on her shoulder, as if seeking tenderly to hold her back.

"Why not?" asked the girl earnestly.

"Because it is better so. It would only hurt you more when we had to say good-bye—after."

"Oh, but that's just why!" she cried passionately.

"No, no—I ask it of you," said he. And, taking the girl's head in his two hands, he kissed her softly on the brow.

A gleam of infinite tenderness shone in her eyes, but she did not speak, only bowed her head and nestled close to his breast.

A strange joy thrilled him—he felt he had won a victory

over himself. Through his thin shirt he could feel the girl's warm breath like a wave of summer sunshine, and, smiling with happiness, he stroked her hair.

It was in his mind to ask her if she did not think herself it was best as he said, when suddenly, ere he could speak, a burning gasp struck him like a flame; the girl's hot lips were pressing fiery kisses on his breast; her arms slipped from his neck and twined themselves close about his waist.

"God in heaven—be careful, child!" He took her arms and tried to draw himself away. But, ere he could loosen her hold, he felt his body thrill in answer to her passionate caress—a torrent of passion rose within him: all thought of self-restraint was whirled away.

"Love, love!" he gasped, his voice almost breaking in tears. He drew her up to him, and closed her thirsting lips with his own, crushing her body against his own till both lay breathless. . . .

THE FIRST SNOWFALL

THIS year, it came later than usual—not until just before Christmas. And when it did come, it was like a rain of silver.

The children greeted it with joyful shouts and a wild throwing of snowballs; the women carried shovelfuls of snow into the rooms and spread it on the floor before sweeping; the men hung tinkling bells to their horses' harness.

Men hurried briskly along the forest tracks, and the great high road to the town was packed with an unbroken throng of pilgrims. All coming and going exchanged greetings, even with strangers—a gay wave of the hand and a few words about the snow.

. . . . . .

Twilight was falling.

Olof had just come in from his work in the forest, and was sitting in his little room in the peasant's hut where he was quartered. An elderly man stepped in—a farmer from the same village.

"Evening—and greetings from the town."

"Evening," said Olof heartily. "Come in and sit down."

"I've little time to sit. I'd a message for you, that was all. Stopped at Valimaki on the way out, and someone gave me this for you."

He took out a small packet and handed it across.

Olof blushed up to the eyes, and stammered a word of thanks.

The messenger pretended not to notice his confusion, and went on, smiling:

"I asked if maybe there was any message besides, and they said no, just give it you as it was—but happen you'd like to hear how 'twas given . . .?"

"Go on—tell me," said the young man, still with some embarrassment.

"Well, I pulled up there, as I said, and started off again just towards dusk about. Got down just past the meadow below the house, and hears someone running after. Thought maybe I'd left something behind, and so I stopped. 'Twas a neat little maid, with red cheeks, and no kerchief on her head. 'What's wrong?' says I.

" 'Nothing,' says the little maid, and looks down at her shoes. 'Only you said—didn't you say Olof was staying your way just now?'

"Well, that was right enough, and I said so. 'And what then?'

" 'Why,' says she, 'I know him—and I'd a message for him.'

" 'Aha,' says I, and laughed a bit.

" ' 'Twas no more than a greeting,' says she, all of a hurry like.

"Why, then, I could carry it, 'twas an easy matter enough.

" 'Can I trust you?' says the girl.

" 'Why, d'you think I'd lose it on the way?' says I.

" 'If you did—or if you went and told about it . . .'

" 'Nay,' says I. 'I'm an old man, my dear, and not given to playing tricks that away.'

" 'Yes, I know,' says she. 'I can trust you.' And then she gives me this.

" 'That's for him?' says I. 'Give it him just as it is?'

" 'Yes. You won't open it, I know. Though, to be sure, anyone can tell what's inside. But be sure no one sees you give it him. There's no message, only just that.'

"Well, I was just on the way to tell her I'd sense enough to do that without being asked—but all of a sudden she's off, racing away with her hair flying behind. Ay, that was the way of it, and now I've told you, I'll be off."

"Good-night, then," said Olof. "And many thanks."

Olof sank into a chair by the table, holding the packet in his hand. He knew well enough what was inside, but hesitated to open it. He was thinking of what had happened there—he could see it himself as in a vision. A bright-eyed girl, slight of figure, hardly more than a child, sat at one end of the room, and at the other a traveller, eating from the red-painted box in which he carried his food. The man spoke of the weather, how the first snow had come, and it was good going underfoot; where he came from, too, the woodcutters had already started work. More work than usual this season, and the gang foreman had taken on a new hand, a young fellow—Olof was his name.

And the girl all but cries his name aloud, blushes violently, and lays down her work to listen. But the traveller says no more of what she is longing to hear, only talks of this and that—all manner of trifling things. The girl is restless, uncertain what to do—but she must do something. And she watches the man's face closely as he sits smoking his pipe on the bench. "He looks honest, and kindly," she thinks to herself. "I could trust him, I know."

And then quietly she slips off to her own room, as if to fetch something, and takes something from a drawer—a lit-

tle thing she has kept there long. Looks for some paper, or a bag, to put it in, searches and looks again, and finds it at last, packs it up and ties it round with string, tying the hardest knot she can manage, and cutting the ends off close, so it can't be opened without being seen—and laughs to herself.

Then she goes back to the room, with the thing in her pocket. The traveller is getting ready to go.

" 'Tis time to mix the cattle food," says the girl. And from the kitchen window she can see the traveller come out to his horse and make ready to start. He drives out of the yard and down the road at a trot. "Now!" says she to herself, and races off after him.

Olof can see her as she runs—how her breast heaves as she comes up with the cart and hails the driver. How she blushes and looks down, and then, having gained her purpose, runs off again too full of joy even to thank the messenger, running a race, as it were, with her own delight. And then, once back at the house, she looks round anxiously to every side, lest any should have seen her, and goes in to her work again. . . .

Filled with a quiet joy, Olof opens the packet.

A big, dark red apple carries her greeting.

"The very colour of the rowans!" he cries—as if the girl had chosen that very one from a great store, though he knows well enough it was likely the only one she had.

And his heart swells with joy and pride at the thought. "Was there ever such a greeting—or such a girl!"

Once more his mind goes back to that happy autumn; he turns the apple in his hand caressingly, and looks out through the window and smiles.

Then he notices that the apple seems harder to the touch in one place, as if to call his attention to something. He looks at it again, and sees that the skin on one side is raised, with a cut all round, as if done with a knife. He lifts the flap of skin, and it comes away like a lid; underneath is a folded slip of paper.

"More!" he cries, and with trembling hands, with joy at heart, he unfolds it. Only a tiny fragment, and on one side a few words awkwardly traced with pencil:

> **"Now I know what it is to be sad. Have you quite forgotten your Rowan? I think of you every night when I go to sleep."**

The apple falls into his lap, the paper trembles in his hand, and a moisture dims his eyes.

He looks up. Great soft snowflakes are dropping slowly to the ground.

Minutes pass. The twilight deepens, till at last all is darkness, but he sits there still looking out, with the paper in his hand.

He can no longer see—but he feels how the great soft snowflakes are still falling. . . .

DAISY

THE daisy bloomed on the window-sill . . . in the window of a little room.

In spring and summer the daisy blooms—this one bloomed in the winter too.

"And I know, and you know why you bloom in the winter," said the girl. "'Tis to smile at him in greeting."

The daisy blooms only a few months together . . . this one was in flower already when Christmas came, and flowered the rest of the winter through, more beautiful every day.

"And I know, and you know how long you will bloom. 'Twas when I set you here at first it all began . . . and when he is gone, and there's none for you to smile at any more, then it will all be over."

The girl bent lower over the flower.

"She has but a single flower—so neat and sweet," she whispered, pressing her delicate lips to the pale posy petals just unfolded.

"She has but a single friend—so tender and dear," smiled the flower in answer, nodding slowly over toward the fields.

A tall youth on ski came gliding by, his cap at the back of his head, and a knapsack strapped at his shoulders.

"At last!" cried the girl, and jumping down, ran out through the passage to the steps in front of the house.

"Daisy!" said the newcomer. His voice was hardly

audible, but his eyes spoke plainly enough, as he stepped up and set his ski and staves against the wall.

The girl answered with a nod and a radiant smile.

He hurried up the steps, and stood beside her.

"Daisy!" he said again, and pressed his cold hands playfully against her cheeks.

"No, thank you!" cried the girl merrily, grasping his wrists. "I've been waiting for you, though, ever so long. Mother's gone in to town, and the men haven't come back from the woods yet."

"And you've been left all alone, and horribly frightened, of course," laughed the young man, holding the girl's head between his hands, and pushing her before him in through the doorway.

They went inside, and he hung up his knapsack on the wall.

"Guess what I've been thinking of to-day all the way home?"

"Oh, you know I never can guess your riddles. What is it?"

"Only"—he drew her down on the seat beside him—"that you ought to have a pair of ski too. If only I can get hold of some proper wood, I'll make a pair in no time."

"No, no, 'tis not worth it. And I can't use them if you did."

"That's just why. You've got to learn. And then you'll be able to come out with me. Come out to the forest one day, and I'll show you something."

"What'll that be, I'd like to know? Only your ugly old stacks of wood."

"Why, as to that, they're none so ugly, after all. And

I'll lift you up and set you on top of the highest of all. . . . No, that wasn't what I meant. But you ought to see . . . Out there in the forest, it's a different world altogether. Roads and villages of its own—ay, and churches and pastors. . . ."

"What nonsense you do talk!" laughed the girl.

" 'Tis true, though, for all that. Come out with me, and see if it's not as I say. . . . Come now, there's plenty of time."

"What are you thinking of? Of course we couldn't go now—nor any other time."

"Yes, we can. And now best of all."

He went across to the corner by the cupboard, took a woollen wrap that had been hung on the line to dry, and fastened it laughingly round her head.

"There—now we're ready."

The girl laughed doubtfully, took off the wrap again, and stood hesitating.

"Oh! Don't you understand yet?" He took the wrap and twisted it in his hands. "You've got to pretend. It's two weeks gone now, and your ski are all ready. We've tried them once or twice out in the meadow, and you manage first-rate, able to go anywhere. And so off we go. . . . Look there!"

The girl joined in the game. She moved across to the window, and looked out into the yard.

"There! I've set the ski all ready, and we put them on. Father and mother and brothers looking out to see us start. There—that's mother knocking at the window.

" 'Be careful not to take her up the big hills,' says mother. 'She'll fall and hurt herself if you do!'

"And I tell her we're going up to the very top of the biggest hill we can find. And off we go.

"And you get along splendidly. Fall—not a bit of it! Off we go to the other end of the meadow, and then through the little copse out on the Hirvisuo—all as easy as play.

"Then we come to a fence—and that's rather more than you can manage. Nothing for it but I must pick you up and lift you over—and you put your arms round me so prettily . . ."

Here the girl broke in hastily: "No, no! I shall turn back if you go on like that!"

"No, you mustn't. It's a very high fence, this one. You can get over the others, perhaps, by yourself. We'll see.—And so we go on, and make our way up the slope of Kaltasenmaki—it's a heavy climb there. But you know the ground—you've fetched the cows home from there many a time. And it's just there the woodcutting begins.

"Now we're up at the top. It's early morning, of course, I forgot that. The sun's just up, and the snow all glittering underfoot and the frost like stars hung in the branches overhead. There! look at the trees over there on the other side. All white and clean and lovely—just like you. And stars of frost there too, sparkling like your eyes. And you think it's lovely too—never dreamed the forest was like that. And of course you haven't—for nobody can till they've seen it for themselves. There! look at that great road there lower down—that's the main track, where all the heavy timber goes—hauled up from a dozen little paths either side—a score of loads sometimes, one after another. And some of the men come singing, or whistling, some talking and calling out to the rest; 'tis a merry business carting down the timber

loads to the river. And see there on the slope—a couple of empty sledges on the way back—isn't it fine?

"And of course you say it is, and it was true all I told you about the forest before. And it gets finer as we go on—you can hear the axe at work all round about, echoing over across the valley. Now we must go and say a word to the men.

"But you don't want to, but I say we must, and you can stay behind a little if you like. And so off we go down the hillside—hey, what a pace! And up the next, and there we are on the top. We can see them at work down in the valley below. It looks like a lot of ants at work, you think. And so it does. And we go across, and you've got to be careful and show how nicely you can go. The snow's all frozen, and creaks underfoot; the men look up, and the stupid ones stand staring open-mouthed. And I bid them good-day, and go up to them a little ahead, and they answer again, and some of them touch their caps, not knowing quite what to do. All of them look astonished—what's this come to see them now? And I tell them it's just a young lady from the town, come out to see a bit of the country, and I'm showing her round. They understand that all right. And then I tell them you're a foreigner, and can't speak a word of their tongue, and that's why you stay behind and won't come up. Then they're all surprised again at that, and some of them won't believe there can be folk that don't speak their language at all; but I tell them it's true all the same, and they stare again, the stupid ones gaping wider than before.

" 'She's put on country clothes so as not to be noticed,' I tell them; 'and if you saw her in her fine dresses, with a real hat on her head and all—why, your eyes'd fall out of

your heads, if you stare like that now.' And they laugh at that, a roar of laugh that echoes all round.

"Then I come back to you, and we go on again.

"But now you begin scolding me for playing silly tricks and telling them all those wild tales—there's neither sense nor meaning in it, you say. But then I simply ask you if didn't see yourself what a treat it was for the men. Simple woodcutter folk—it'll be something to remember all their lives, how one day a beautiful foreign lady came out to visit them in the forest. And then you must remember to be a foreigner all day. If I have to speak to you when there's anyone else about, I say it in Swedish; you can't speak Swedish, of course, but all you have to do is just nod and smile and speak with your eyes—that's all that's needed.

" 'But I won't,' you say. 'I'm not going to pretend like that.' "

Here the girl herself broke in: "No, that I certainly wouldn't either, so that's true enough."

"Oh, but you'd have to, you know, once we've started. And so we go on. There's nobody from our parts among the gangs at work there, so there's no risk of anyone knowing you really.

"And so we go on, from one gang to another. And it all goes off splendidly. But then we come to a clearing, where the men are just lighting a fire of pine knots. It's their dinner-time, and we're going to sit down and have dinner with them, say I.

"But of course you make a fuss, and say you won't, but you give in after a bit—it's easy enough. You've only to

sit down, and say '*Tak, Tak*' in Swedish whenever I pass you anything.

"The men are at work about the fire as we come up. And you're all excitement, and red and white by turns, just like any grand lady from foreign parts. And I tell them the same thing again, about you putting on country clothes and all that, and ask if we may sit down—and perhaps the foreign young lady might like to eat a morsel too.

" 'We've naught that's fit to offer the likes of her,' say the men.

" 'She can eat what other folks can, I suppose,' say I.

"Then they all tumble over one another to make a nice seat for you with twigs of pine. Then we sit down, and I'm on the outside, in case you want anything.

"Oh, it's grand. The fire flames up, and the snow melting like butter all round and under, and the men's faces all aglow. One of them's roasting a piece of meat, another fish, on a skewer, and the others bring out their frozen bread and thaw it soft and fresh as if it had just come out of the oven. And I do the same, toasting a piece of meat and thawing some bread, and put one on the other and cut up your part with my knife, to neat little bits all ready.

"And the men are all so interested they forget to eat.

" 'I hope it's to your taste, my lady?' That's me talking in Swedish as I pass it. And you nod and smile, and eat just a little to try, and the moment you've tasted it you open your mouth and I know as sure as anything you're just on the point of saying right out in Finnish that it's first-rate, and you've never tasted anything so good. . . . So I have to put in a word myself or you'll spoil it all. 'A little more, if you please, my lady?' Like that."

But here the girl could contain herself no longer, and laughed outright.

"What are you laughing at? That's not right a bit. No, you just blush, and go on nibbling at a crust of bread, just like a tiny mouse. . . .

"And the men nudge each other to look. Here's a fine lady sitting down to eat as natural as can be, for all there's neither plate nor fork. And it's all I can do to keep from laughing myself, and you have to bite your lips and bend down behind me.

"Then I take out our milk bottle, that's been warming by the fire.

" 'How'll they manage now?' says one, and all the rest look on to see.

" 'Why, we'll just have to share and share about, unless the lady's to go without,' say I. And then I make believe to whisper something in your ear.

"And you nod, and take the bottle and drink, and hand it to me after.

" ' 'Tis as good as newly milked,' say I. And you laugh, and the men laugh too.

"Then I take a drink, and you again. I wipe the mouth of the bottle on my sleeve each time before giving it you. And the men, of course, they think that's a mighty fine way of doing things.

" 'Never would have thought it,' says one of them. And they go on with their meal.

" 'Do as the folks you fall in with, it seems,' says one bolder than the rest.

" 'Just so,' say I, 'and that's as it should be'; and there's no saying anything against that, and so we get on finely.

"Then when the meal's over, we lie down by the fire a bit. One man takes out some leaf tobacco from his pack, and cuts it up on a tree stump—hadn't had time before. Then he passes it round, and I fill my pipe too, for all that I'm in company with a fine lady.

"And then we go on our way. But when we've got a few paces off, I turn round suddenly and say, 'Here, you, Heikki, give us a bit of a sermon for the young lady. 'Tis just the place for church.'

" 'H'm,' says Heikki. 'I don't think it would do.'

" ' 'Twill please her, for sure—I'll answer for that,' say I. 'And you do it better than anything else. Antti can help with the service.'

" 'Yes, yes!' cry the others. 'If she's wanting to see things out here. Sermon, Heikki!'

"Heikki climbs up on a big rock, and Antti on a tree stump, and Heikki starts off, grumbling out just like the pastor at Kakela.

" 'Is—any soul—from Keituri—here in—church to-day?'

" 'Ay, lord and noble master, here be I,' says Antti in a deep base that goes rumbling through the woods.

"And so they go through the service, and after, Heikki begins to preach. It's the wildest nonsense, Swedish and Finnish and gipsy-talk and all sorts of odd lingo muddled up together, and he pours out the words like a river in flood. The men are in fits of laughter all the time, and you—you're near to bursting.

" 'The young lady bids me thank you very much,' say I, when it's over. 'Both of you. Says she's never heard so fine a sermon all her life.'

"'Tis well said,' say the men. 'Heikki, he's a wonder to preach, that he is.'

"And so they wave their caps to us as we go off."

"Oh!" said the girl delightedly. "And is it really like that, I wonder?"

"Yes, of course. Only you mustn't say anything. We must go home now—then we can talk all about it after.

"And we go up the hill and start off down the other side.

"When we get down on the flat, you begin putting on the pace, to see if you can go as fast as I can—and it's all I can do to keep up with you. And your cheeks are red as roses, and you're so hot you take off your kerchief and fasten it round your waist like a sash. And there you are running beside me, bareheaded, and your bright hair lifting as you go. I've never seen you look so beautiful before, and I tell you so. You ought to be like that always.

"And so we come home, as happy as can be. . . . And here we are!"

"You *can* make stories!" cried the girl. "It was wonderful! Just as if we'd really been there and seen it all."

"Ah, we'll do it really one day, we must. And it'll be ever so much easier then, after you've seen it once to-day."

"No, no! I never can, I know."

"Wait and see," said he. "Now, you know what a grand life it is in the forest in winter. A glorious life—though there's trouble, too, at times—danger and hurt; but who cares for that? Do you wonder that I'm always in high spirits when I come home? And when I am here, why, 'tis just like another little world, as clean and fresh as there. . . . Daisy—sit here, and let me look at you."

The girl sat down on his knee and rested one hand on his shoulder.

"Don't laugh at me," she said softly. "I'm not a bit clever, I know. Just nothing—to you."

"You don't know a bit what you are—but I do. And shall I tell you, just for once, what you are to me?"

The girl laughed happily. "If you'll be sure and only tell the truth!"

"The truth—of course! How could I help it? Now, listen. Once I was in a big town, where there was a picture gallery, and lots of marble statues—like the old Greeks used to make. You've read about them, haven't you?"

"Yes, I think so. But I've never seen them."

"Well, there were lots of these statues, white as snow, and looking just like life. And they were all naked, with never a rag to cover them, but for all that one could look at them, as calm and pure as on the face of God. For they were so beautiful that one could think of nothing but the sacred beauty God has given to the human form. And—can you guess what I'm going to say now?"

"How should I guess?" said the girl, looking down shyly, as if with some inkling she would not confess of what was in his mind.

"Just this—you are like that to me: a marble statue, white and cool, with a beauty that is holy in itself. And I thank God that made you so beautiful and pure."

"Now you're laughing at me again," said the girl sadly.

" 'Tis solemn earnest. Listen. Ask yourself, in the time we've been together here, have we ever exchanged a single kiss, a single touch, with any thought of passion?"

"Passion?" The girl's eyes looked frankly into his.

"Yes. . . . It might have been, you know. I am passionate by nature, but when I look at you, it cools and dies. I am telling you the truth when I say you have been like a healing, cooling draught to one in a fever. And I believe you have changed me altogether, now and for ever after."

"I don't think I understand—not all of it. But have you really been so happy?"

"So unspeakably happy. Yes. And glad to feel myself strong and self-restrained. I have often thought that no one could ever dream what happiness and beauty can live in one little grey village. Do you know what I think? I believe that in every little grey village there is a quiet, secret happiness, that no one knows."

"Not everywhere, Olof. It is not everywhere there is anyone like you."

"But you! I don't mean to say, of course, it should be just like ours. But a happiness . . ."

He drew the girl to him, and their lips met in a long, gentle kiss.

"Can everyone kiss like you?" she whispered shyly, with a tender gleam in her eyes.

"Maybe. I don't know."

"No, no—there's no one in the world like you. None that can talk like you, or kiss like you. Do you know what I always think—always look at, when you kiss me?"

"No—tell me, tell me!" he cried eagerly.

"No—I don't think I can."

"Something you can't tell *me,* Daisy-flower? Come, don't you think it's your turn to tell me something now?"

"Well, then—only, you mustn't laugh. I know it's silly. I always—I always look at your neck. There's a big vein

just there, and it beats so prettily all the time. And then I feel as if your soul were flowing through it—right into me. And it does, for I can feel it!"

"That's the loveliest thing you've ever said in all your life," said he solemnly. "We won't talk any more now, only be together. . . ."

. . . . . .

Spring was near; it was open war between the sun and the cold. The snowdrifts had begun to disappear.

Strange dreams were at work in Olof's mind.

"She loves me—warmly and truly," he told himself. "But is her love deep and strong enough for her to forget all else, and give herself up fully and freely to her lover?"

"And could you let her? Could you accept that sacrifice —from one like her?"

"No, no. I didn't mean that, of course. But if only I could be sure—could feel beyond all doubt that she *would;* that she was ready to give up everything for my sake. . . ."

"And you count *that* the final test of love? Shame on you!"

The colour faded from the evening sky; the stars were lit . . . the errant fancies died away.

. . . . . .

In the brilliant sunlight they returned—the same strange dreams welling up on every side, like the waters of spring. Behind and before him, everywhere, insistently, an irresistible song.

"I must know—I must sound the uttermost depths of her love!"

"Can you not see how cruel it would be—cruel to her beyond all others?"

"But only to know! To ask as if only in jest. . . ."

"In jest? And you would jest with such a thing as this!"

And the dreams sank down into the hurrying waters; yet still the warm clouds sailed across the sky.

. . . . . .

Like a rushing flood—the old desire again.

"Can anything be cruel that is meant in love? A question only—showing in itself how deeply I love her? It is torture not to know; I must break through it—I must learn the truth!"

". . ." But the other voice was lost in a rush of foaming waters.

. . . . . .

He took the girl's hand in his, and spoke warmly, with beautiful words.

Her fair brow darkened under a cloud—so dark seemed any cloud there that for a moment he wished he had not spoken.

"I never thought you could doubt me," she murmured, almost in tears. "Or ask—or ask for that!"

"Oh, my love," he thought. "If you only knew! Just one word, and then I can tell you all—and we shall be doubly happy after."

So he thought, but he did not speak. And now he could think of nothing but the moment when he could tell her that it was but a question in all innocence—a trial of her love.

"It is because I love you as I do," she said, "that I could not do it. We have been so happy—but *that* would be something strange between us. And now that you are going away . . ." She stopped, and the two looked at each other sorrowfully. It was as if already something strange had

crept between them, as if they had hurt each other unwittingly, and suffered at the thought.

. . . . . .

Day by day their parting drew nearer, the sun was veiled in a dreary mist.

Then one day she came to him, strangely moved, and clung to him, slight and yielding as the drooping curtains of the birch, swayed by the wind. Clung to him, threw her arms warmly round his neck, and looked into his eyes with a new light in her own.

"What—what is it?" he asked, with emotion, hovering between fear and a strange delight.

"Olof—I am . . . I can say it now. . . ."

A tumult of joy rose up in him at her words. He clasped her to him in a fervent embrace, and opened his lips to tell her the secret at last. But his heart beat all too violently, a hand seemed clutching his throat, and he could not utter a word, but crushed her closer to him, and pressed his lips to hers.

Drawn two ways, he seemed, and now but one; all thought of the other vanished utterly. His breast was almost bursting with a desperate regret; he could not speak, and would not even if he could.

And then, as he felt the pressure of her embrace return his own, regret was drowned in an ecstasy of surrender.

"I love you," she whispered, "as only *your mother* ever could!"

Olof turned cold. It was as if a stranger had surprised them in an intimate caress.

"Olof," she murmured, with an unspeakable tenderness in her eyes. And as if some great thing had suddenly come

into her mind she went on: "You have never told me about your mother. . . . No, don't tell me now; I know it all myself. She is tall like you, and stately, and upright still as ever. And she has just the same bright eyes, and little hollows at the temples, like you have. And she wears a dark striped apron, with a little pocket at the side, where she keeps her knitting, and takes it out now and then to work at as she goes."

"How could you know!" he cried, in pleased surprise. His fear was gone now, and he felt only a wonderful depth of happiness at hearing the girl speak so tenderly of his mother.

" 'Tis only guessing. But do you know—I should so like to see her, your mother, that. . . ."

"That . . .?"

"Only . . . only, I should like to see her so. Then I'd put my arms round her neck and . . . Olof, did your mother often kiss you?"

"No. Not often."

"But she stroked your hair, and often talked with you all alone, I know."

"Yes . . . yes."

His arms loosed their hold of the girl, and almost unconsciously he thrust her a little away, staring out into the distance with a faint smile on his lips and deepest earnest in his eyes.

The girl looked at him wonderingly.

"What is it?" she asked anxiously, as if fearing to have hurt him. But he did not seem to hear, only stood looking out at nothing as before.

"Olof—what is it?" she asked again, in evident distress.

"Only—it was only my mother speaking to me all alone," he answered in a low voice.

"Oh!" The girl sighed deeply. "Now—was it just now she spoke?"

He nodded.

The girl glanced at him and hesitated. "Won't you—won't you tell me what she said?" she asked timidly.

"She told me it was wrong—a sinful wrong even to ask you. . . ."

The girl gazed at him for a long time without speaking; the tenderness in her eyes grew to unutterable depths.

"Oh," she whispered at last, very softly, "if she only knew how I love her now—your mother! I never loved her so before." And she clasped her arms round his neck.

THE RAPIDS

THE rapids at Kohiseva are well known; none so well known, nor so ill famed, in all the length of Nuoli River.

And the homestead at Moisio is a well-known place, for they are a stubborn race that hold it; for generations past the masters of Moisio have been known among their neighbours as men of substance, and hard in their dealings to boot —unswerving and pitiless as the waters of Kohiseva.

The daughter of Moisio is well known too; none carries her head so high, and a tender glance from her eyes is more than any of the young men round can boast of having won.

Kyllikki is her name—and no one ever had such a name—at least, folk say there's no such name in the calendar.

. . . . . .

The lumbermen's rearguard had come to Kohiseva. They came by night, and here they were at their first day's work there now. Some were still busy floating the last of the timber down; others were clearing the banks of lumber that had driven ashore.

It was evening, and the men were on their way to their quarters in the village.

In the garden at Moisio a young girl was watering some plants newly set.

A youth came walking down the road beyond the fence. Some distance off, he caught sight of the girl, and watched her critically as he came up.

"This must be the one they spoke of," he said to himself. "The girl that's proud beyond winning!"

The girl's slender figure straightened as she rose from her stooping position, and threw back the plaited hair that had fallen forward over one shoulder; she bowed her head in demure self-consciousness.

"She's all they say, by her looks," thought the youth, and slackened his steps involuntarily as he passed.

The girl watched him covertly. "So that's the one they've all been talking about," she said to herself. "The one that's not like any of the rest."

She bent down to fill her can.

"Shall I speak to her?" the young man asked himself.

"But suppose she'll have nothing to do with you?"

"H'm. 'Twould be the first that ever took it so!" And he smiled.

The girl bent over her work again; the young man came nearer.

"I wonder if he'll have the impudence to speak to me," she thought. "'Twould be like him, from what they say. But let him try it with me . . .!"

"Like to like's the best way, I doubt," said the youth to himself. "If she's so proud, I'd better be the same." And he walked by resolutely, without so much as a glance at her, after all.

"Ho!" The girl spilled some of the water with a splash to one side. "So that's his way, is it?"

She cast a look of displeasure at him as he passed down the road—to go by like that without a word was almost a greater offence than if he had spoken.

. . . . . .

Next evening she was there again.

And this time he stopped.

"Good evening," he said, raising his hat with rather more of pride than courtesy.

"Good evening." She flung the words at him over her shoulder, turning her head but just so much as to show the corner of an eye.

Silence.

"What lovely roses!"

The speech was pleasant enough in itself, almost a compliment. But there was a challenge in the words—as the speaker himself was aware.

"They're well enough," she answered carelessly, as if to imply that she had no more to say—he could go on if he cared to.

"I wonder, now, if you'd give me one—one of the red ones yonder—if it's not too much to ask?"

The girl drew herself up. "'Tis not our way at Moisio to give roses over the fence to strangers—though there may be those elsewhere that are willing enough."

"Though there may be those elsewhere . . ." The young man flushed. He understood what was in her mind—the tone of her voice was enough. He had expected something of this at their first encounter, but for all that he was startled at the fierce resolution in her opening thrust.

"'Tis not my way to beg for roses over every fence," he answered proudly. "Nor to ask a thing twice of anyone. Good-night!"

The girl looked at him, astonished. She had not expected anything like this.

He walked on a few paces, then stopped suddenly, and

clearing the ditch with a leap, stood leaning against the fence.

"There's just one thing I'd like to say—if I may," he said, glancing sharply at her.

"You can say what you please, I suppose," she answered.

"Just this, then," he went on. "If any day you should find you have set too high a price upon your roses, then take the one I asked for, and wear it yourself. It could not hurt your pride, I think. It would only show that you counted me a fellow-creature at least."

"Too high at least to be given to any tramp that is bold enough to ask," said the girl, facing him squarely. "If anyone cares for them, he must venture more than that."

They looked each other straight in the eyes for a moment.

"I'll bear that in mind," said the youth, with emphasis. "Good-bye."

"Good-bye," said the girl.

He walked on, and she stood watching him.

"Not like the others—they were right in that," said she, and went on with her work.

. . . . . .

That Sunday afternoon a crowd of people gathered on Kohiseva bridge. There was not room for all, and the banks were thickly lined on either side.

There were rumours of unusual doings abroad—and folk had come out to see.

"Next Sunday afternoon at four," the news had run, "a match at Kohiseva—shooting the rapids."

And folk pricked up their ears aghast—down the rapids at Kohiseva on a stick of timber; it was more than any had ever ventured yet. True, there was the man some ten

years back—a foolhardy fellow from a neighbouring district —who had tried the lower reach, which was less dangerous by far, but he was dead when he came ashore.

Anyhow, it was to be done now. There were two gangs of lumbermen in the place, and, as it chanced, men of unusual daring and skill in each. A dispute had arisen between the headmen as to the merits of their respective parties, and the only way to settle it was by a match, the headman of the losing gang to stand treat all round.

All Kohiseva was afoot, and many had come in from the village round. It was no light thing to try the rapids there.

The sight-seers on the bridge moved this way and that, eagerly discussing the event.

" 'Tis a mad idea, for sure."

"Ay, they'll have been drunk the time, no doubt."

"There's no man in his sober senses would ever try it."

"But which of them is it?" asked one. "Who's going down?"

"One of them's just a mad young fool that'll do anything if you dare him."

"Ay, there's some of that sort most ways to be found. But 'tis a mad thing to do."

"None so mad, perhaps," put in another. "They say he's the cleverest of them all."

"I doubt but Kohiseva'll be one too clever for him. And the other—who's he?"

"Why, didn't you know? There he is standing over there; Olof, they say's his name."

"That one? He looks a sight too fine for a lumberman at all."

" 'Tis him none the less for that."

"What's he doing in the gang, anyway? 'Tis not his business, by the look of him."

"Ay, you may say so, but there's none knows more about him than all can see. Book-learned, they say he is, and speaks foreign lingos, but Olof's all the name he goes by."

"H'm. Must be a queer sort."

"Ay, there's more than one queer sort among these gangs. But if any ever gets through the rapids, I say 'twill be him and no other."

"Wait and see," grumbled an adherent of the opposite party.

"Hey—look! there's old man Moisio pushing through to the foremen. Now, what's he want with them, I wonder?"

The foremen stood midway across the bridge. One of them, Falk, was leaning against the parapet, puffing at his tasselled pipe, and smiling. The other, Vantti he was called, a sturdy, thick-set fellow, stood with his hands in his pockets and a cigar between his teeth. Vantti came from the north-east, from Karelen, and was proud of it, as he was proud of his Karelen dialect and his enormous Karelen boots—huge, crook-toed thigh-boots that seemed to swallow him up to the waist.

Moisio came up to the two. "What's this about the rapids?" he said sternly. "If you've put up a match, as they're saying here, then I've come to say you'd better put it off before harm comes of it. Five men's lives the river's taken here in my time. And we've no wish for more."

"Easy, Moisio," says Vantti, taking the cigar from his mouth, and spitting a thin jet sideways. "No call to take it that way. 'Tis but a bit of a show we've got up to amuse the village folk."

"Call it what you please," answered Moisio. "You'll mark what I say. I'm answerable for order in this place, and if any harm comes afterwards, I'll call you to account for it. 'Tis no lawful way, to risk men's lives for a bet."

"Moisio's right," cried several among the crowd.

The two headmen consulted in a whisper.

"Ay, if that's the way of it," says Vantti at last, and offers his hand. Falk takes it, and turns to face the crowd.

"Listen," he says aloud. "Vantti, here, and I, we take you to witness that we've called off our bet here and now. So there's none can blame us afterwards. If the two men who've entered for the match will cry off too, there's an end of it. If not, 'tis their own affair."

All eyes were turned towards the two competitors, who stood facing each other, with their friends around.

One of them, a young man in a bright red coat, lifts his head boldly. "I'm not afraid of drowning, and not going to drown," he cries.

"You draw back, then," says Moisio to Olof. "He'll not care to make the trip alone. No man's gone down the rapids here and lived—'tis madness to try."

Olof scans the water with a critical eye, the crowd waiting expectantly the while.

"I'll not deny it," says he at last. "Don't think I'm paying no heed to what you say. But I've a reason of my own for doing something more than most would venture—and I'll not draw back." He spoke loudly and clearly; all on the bridge could hear his words.

Moisio said no more, but drew back a little.

"Well, who's to go first?" said Falk.

"Let me," says Redjacket.

"As you please," said Olof.

Moisio turned to the headmen again. "You'll have some men on the farther bank," he said, "in case of accidents."

"Not on my account," puts in Redjacket scornfully. "But if the other man here wants fishing up . . ."

"Have them there if you like," says Olof. "'Twill do no harm."

The men take up their poles; those on the bridge look expectantly down the river.

Kohiseva Rapids are a lordly sight in spring, when the river is full. The strong arch of the bridge spans its powerful neck, and just below the rapids begin, rushing down the first straight reach with a slight fall here and there. Then curving to the right, and breaking in foam against the rocky wall of Akeanlinna—a mighty fortress of stone rising straight up in midstream, with a clump of bushes like a helmet plume on its top. The river then divides, the left arm racing in spate down to the mill, the right turning off through a channel blasted out of the rock for the passage of timber going down. A wild piece of water this; the foam dances furiously in the narrow cut, but it ends as swiftly as the joy of life; over a ledge of rock the waves are flung a couple of fathoms down into the whirlpool called Eva's Pool. Here they check and subside, the channel widens out below, and the water passes on at a slower pace through the easier rapids below.

That is Kohiseva. The rock of Akeanlinna would be left untroubled were it not for the lumbermen and their work. In the floating season the channel between it and the left bank is filled with timber, gathering like a great bridge, against which new arrivals fling themselves in fury, till they are drawn down through the cut.

The task which the rival champions have set themselves to-day is to make their way down the upper rapids as far as Akeanlinna, and there spring off—if they can—at the block —for there is no getting down through the cut on a timber baulk, and none could go over the ledge to Eva's Pool and live.

The men have taken up their places on the bank, and the two competitors are preparing to start.

"Wouldn't it be as well to send a couple of baulks down first, for whirlpools and hidden rocks?" suggests Olof.

"Ho, yes!" cries his rival. "And get a surveyor to mark it all out neatly on a chart—a fine idea!"

Redjacket's party burst out laughing at this, and all looked at Olof.

He flushes slightly, but says nothing, only bites his lip and turns away to study the river once more.

Redjacket looks at him sneeringly, and, pole in hand, steps out on to the boom, a little way above the bridge. Then, springing over to the raft, he chooses his craft for the voyage —a buoyant pine stem, short and thick, and stripped of its bark.

The young man smiles, with a curious expression, as he looks on.

"Did you see?" whispers one on the bridge to his neighbour. "Mark my words, he knows what he's about."

"Look out ahead!" Redjacket slips his tree trunk under the boom, and steps out on to it. Then with a touch of his foot he sends it round and round—spinning it, and sending up the water on either side.

"Ay, he's a smart lad," say the onlookers on the bridge.

Redjacket stops his manœuvres now, gives a bold glance

towards the bridge, then, with a shrill whistle, fixes the point of his pole in the wood; then, stepping back a little, with his hands on his hips, begins, mockingly, to "say his prayers."

"There! Ever see such a lad?" Redjacket's partisans look round proudly at the rest.

"Look at him—look!"

"Have done with that!" cries a stern voice from the crowd. "'Tis no time for mockery."

"What's it to you whether I choose to sing or pray?" cries Redjacket, with an oath. But he stops his show of praying, all the same, and picks up his pole again. He is nearing the bridge now.

Already the angry water swirls over the stem and laps his boots, but he stands fast.

The speed increases, the log itself disappears in a flurry of foam—those on the bridge hold their breath.

Then it comes up again. The current thrusts against its hinder end, and the buoyant wood answers to it like the tail of a fish, slipping sideways round; the steersman sways, but with a swing of his pole recovers his balance, and stands steady as before.

A sigh of relief from the watchers.

"Tra la la la!" sings Redjacket, undismayed. And he takes a couple of dance-steps on his log.

"He's no greenhorn, anyhow," the crowd agree. And some of them glance at Olof—to see how he takes their praise of his rival.

But Olof does not seem to heed; he is watching the water with a certain impatience—no more.

Just then Redjacket's log strikes a sunken rock, and is thrust backward. A swift movement—the log comes down

with a splash into the foam; the man bends over, straightens his body, and stands upright as before, then strikes an attitude, and sails on past the obstacle.

"Well done—well done!"

"'Twas a marvel he cleared it."

The log goes on its way, the man standing easily as ever.

Then once more it collides. The fore end lifts—an oath is heard—next second the red jacket shows in a whirl of water. Then it disappears.

A movement of anxiety on the bridge—the watchers on the bank spring to their feet.

He is up again, swimming athwart the stream. A few powerful strokes, and he reaches the dead water close inshore.

Cursing aloud, he sits down and pours the water from his boots. One of the men posted at Akeanlinna brings him his pole—but his hat is gone. He hurries up along the bank.

"Enough—give over now!" cry those on the bridge.

"Go and tell your mother!" he answers furiously.

"Maybe he'd like to have that chart now, after all," says one, with a sly glance.

He pulls off his red coat. "Seeing I've lost my hat, I can do without a jacket." A blue shirt shows up on the raft; he picks out a fresh log, thrusts it angrily under the boom, and comes floating down towards the bridge.

"Now you can stare till you think you'll know me again."

Not a sound from those on the bridge.

The log shoots down, the man stands erect, and passes proudly under the gaze of all. He plies his pole to the right, and the log swerves a little to the opposite side—the

first obstacle is safely passed, though it almost cost him his footing again.

"Aha! He's on his guard this time! Maybe he'll do it, after all!"

"Well, he said you'd know him again!" Redjacket's party are recovering confidence.

The log hurries on, the man balancing carefully with his pole.

Nearing the second rock now—the figure crouches down and steps a little back. A sudden shock, a crash—his pole has broken, and the blue shirt disappears in the rapids.

"Look! Right down there! He'll never get ashore this time." The onlookers crowd together, straining to see.

The blue shirt comes into view for a moment.

"He'll never do it—'tis right out in midstream."

"Hi—look out there on the bank!"

"He'll be smashed to pieces on the Malli Rock."

"No, no! he's too far out."

The blue shirt is carried past the threatening rock, but making straight for the big raft below. A clenched hand is raised to bid the men there stand aside—he will manage alone. But they take no heed. One thrusts a pole between the swimmer's legs as he nears the raft, another grasps him by the neck, and they haul him up—a heavy pull, with the water striving all the time to suck him under. Inch by inch the blue shirt rises above the edge.

He limps ashore, supported by a man on either side. One knee is bleeding.

" 'Tis more than man can do!" he cries in a broken voice, shaking his fist toward the bridge.

. . . . . .

There is a low murmur of voices on the bridge, an anxious whispering. Olof picks up his pole. Close behind him a young girl plucks at the sleeve of an elderly man, and seems to be urging him, entreating. . . .

Moisio turns to Olof. "Once more I ask of you—let it be enough. You have seen how your companion fared. Do not try it again."

"I must," answered Olof in a voice cold and hard as steel, with a ring of confidence that impressed those who heard.

He goes off to the raft, picks out a log and tries its buoyancy with care. A long pine stem, with the bark off, and floating deep in the water.

"Ah—he's choosing a horse of another sort!"

" 'Tis another sort of rider, too, by his looks."

Olof was nearing the bridge now—calmly, without a word watching the course of the river all the time. Reaching the bridge, he raised his eyes for a moment, and met the glance of a girl looking down. A faint smile, and the slightest inclination of the head, no more.

"Good luck to you!" cried several of the onlookers; a certain sympathy was evident among the crowd.

Now he glides under the bridge, on towards the perilous stage of the journey—all watch with eager eyes.

The strange craft cleaves the waves, sending up spray on either hand—but the heavy log, floating deep, hardly moves; the steersman keeps his footing steadily as on firm ground.

"That's the way! Ah, he knows the sort of craft to choose for the work!"

The log hurries on, the lithe figure bends a little, balancing with the pole.

"Turn off—turn off! He's making straight for the rock!"

He stands poised, with muscles tense, his pole in readiness, his eyes fixed on the whirl about the sunken rock, his knees slightly bent.

A shock—and he springs deftly in air as the heavy log is thrust backward under him—taking his footing again as firmly as before.

"Bravo, bravo! Finely done!"

On again. A few quick, powerful strokes with the pole—and the rock that had been his rival's undoing is safely passed.

"He'll do it! He's the man!" The onlookers were all excitement now.

The speed increases, the lithe figure swaying to either side. A thrust from the left—he springs light-footed to meet it.

Once more his body is bent, his pole held firmly, knees crouching deep—those on the bridge crane their necks to watch.

The next shock comes with a crash that is plainly heard by those upstream; again he springs as the log thrusts back, and comes down neatly as before. A few paces forward to get his balance, then back a step or two like a tight-rope walker.

"That's the way, lad!"

"He knows how to dance!"

"Look out for Malli Rock!"

"Ay, if he can clear that!"

Malli Rock stands ready to meet the attack; the rapids are tearing past on either side.

The log comes down, making full towards the smooth, sloping face of the rock.

Olof swerves a little to the right, and leaps off, coming

down in a whirl of spray. The rock has done its part, and sent the end of the log high out of the water; Olof lands on it and goes on again, the log scraping the face of the rock as it passes.

"Sticks like a leech, he does! He's done it now!"

A cheer from the crowd.

Straight down in midstream now. A little ahead the river bends—he is nearing the block at Akeanlinna.

"Now for the last lap!"

"Ay—and the worst of all!"

Two—three short paces back—the log brings up full against the block.

A leap and a crash, a run almost to the fore end of the log before he can check his pace. The log is flung out again into the current, and shivers as if paralysed by the blow. Then the water carries it down again.

The men at their posts stare helplessly—one of them gives a cry, and the onlookers shudder. "Heavens—he's missed it now!"

More shouting, and men running up and down the banks; others standing as if rooted to the spot.

Olof glances at the mass of timber by the rock. A swing of the pole, a sudden deft turn, and hurrying to the other end of the log he begins poling hard across the stream.

"He's making for the other bank!"

"He'll never do it—and there's no one there to help!"

"Oh—look! He'll be carried over the edge!"

Hard fighting now. Olof is striving to reach the farther bank, the current is drawing the end of the log nearer and nearer the falls—already the water is seething over it.

Two furious strokes, a swift step, and another, and, lift-

ing his pole, he flies through the air—toward the shore. The pole strikes something, as all on the bridge can hear—then he is lost to sight.

A rush of men downstream, crying and shouting. . . .

Then, a moment later, a waving of hats from the men at Akeanlinna, and a cheer is passed from group to group upstream. Some stop, others race on—he is saved—but how?

Then a tall figure appears standing on the shore, waving his hand triumphantly. A mighty cheer from all the onlookers and a waving of hats and kerchiefs. "There he is!"

Olof walks up with easy steps, but the blood is streaming down his face. The first to meet him is a girl, her face pale, her body trembling with emotion. She is standing by herself—the others are still far off.

Olof stops and hesitates—shall he go to meet her, or turn off? The girl casts down her eyes. He draws nearer—she looks up, and gives him one deep, warm glance, and looks down again—her cheeks flushed.

Olof's face lights up, and he lifts his hat as he passes. Then the crowd surges round him with shouts of applause.

"Bravo! Well done! Here's the man that's beaten Kohiseva! Who's the best man now?" Vantti steps forward and lays a hand on his shoulder. "Well done, lad! 'Tis plain to see you're not born to be drowned." And the sturdy fellow laughs till his great boots shake.

"You've made a name for yourself to-day," says Falk.

" 'Olof' was a bit short, maybe. . . ."

"Aha-a-a!"

"So now they'll call you Kohiseva—and a good name too!"

" 'Tis as good as another," said Olof, with a laugh. "And longer, anyway."

"And now we'll go down to the mill and see about drinks all round. Twice round, it ought to be—'twas worth it!"

. . . . . .

When Olof came home that evening a girl sat anxiously waiting at Moisio.

A bright rose was stuck between the palings of the fence beside the road. Olof sprang across the ditch—the girl drew her head back behind the curtain.

He fastened the rose in his coat. With a grateful glance he searched the garden, up towards the house, but no one was to be seen.

In the safe shelter of her room a girl sat bowed over the table with her face hidden in her arms, crying softly.

THE SONG OF THE BLOOD-RED FLOWER

"WHY are you so sad this evening, Olof?" asked the girl.

"Sad?" he repeated, almost to himself, staring absently before him. "Yes—I wish I knew."

"But how—when it is yourself—don't you know?"

"No—that's the strange thing about it. I don't know."

There was a pause.

"I won't ask you if you don't like it," she said, after a while. "But if I were sad, and had a friend, I should want to."

"And make your friend sad too—by telling things no friend could understand?"

"Perhaps a friend might try."

But Olof seemed not to have heard. He leaned back, and his glance wandered vaguely.

"Life is very strange," he said dreamily. "Isn't it strange to have cared very much for a thing—and then one day to feel it as nothing at all?"

She looked inquiringly at him.

"My own life, for instance. Up to now, it has been a beautiful story, but now . . ."

"Now . . .?"

"Now, I can't see what it is—or if it is anything at all. Going from place to place, from river to river—from one adventure to another . . ."

Again there was a pause.

"But why do you live so?" she asked timidly. "I have so often wondered."

"I wonder myself sometimes why I must live so—or if I must—but it goes on all the same."

"Must . . .? But your home . . . your father and mother, are they still alive? You have never spoken of them."

"Yes, they are still alive."

"And couldn't you live with them?"

"No," he said coldly. "They could not make me stay."

"But aren't you fond of them?" she asked in surprise.

He was silent a moment. "Yes," he said at last, "I am fond of them—as I am fond of many other things. But there is nothing that can hold me for long."

Something within him was striving for utterance—something he had long restrained.

"And now," he went on, almost violently, "I want . . ." He stopped.

"You want . . .?"

"It is something to do with you, Kyllikki," he said earnestly, as if in warning.

"Tell me. You need not be afraid," said the girl in a low voice.

"I want to say good-bye to you—and *not* as friends," he said passionately.

"Not—not as friends?"

"That is what I said. We met first—you know how it was—it was no friendly meeting. And best if we could leave each other that way too."

"But why . . .?"

"Because—shall I tell you?"

"I want you to."

He looked her sharply and coldly in the eyes. "Because you have not been what I hoped you would. Ay, and

thought you would. I was proud and happy when I knew I had won your friendship. But I thought I had won more than that—something warmer and deeper—a thing complete."

She was silent for a moment.

"Warm and deep—a thing complete?" she repeated. "Did you *give* that yourself?"

"No! But I could have done. I wished to—but you made it impossible. We have known each other now for a week—and what has come of it? I have scarcely dared to take your hand."

"But what more could you . . .?"

"What more? Have you for my own—possess you. All or nothing!"

The girl seemed struggling with some inward feeling.

"May I ask you something?" she asked softly.

"Go on!"

"Have me for your own, you said." She hesitated, but went on resolutely: "Does that mean—have me for your own to-day, and go away to-morrow—and then, perhaps, think of me at times as one among a host of others you have 'possessed'?"

He shot a glance at her, almost of hatred, but said no word.

"Perhaps," went on the girl calmly, "perhaps you too have not been what I hoped and thought. If you had . . ."

"What then?" he asked quickly, as if in challenge.

"Then you would not—speak as you are doing now," she answered evasively. "And perhaps what makes you angry now is only this—that you can never have more than you are able to take yourself."

He looked at her in wonder.

"And perhaps"—her voice was scarcely audible now—"perhaps you cannot take more than you are able to keep?"

She looked down in confusion, hardly knowing what she had said, only that she had been forced to say it.

He sat watching her for a while thoughtfully, as if he had heard something new and unexpected, and was pondering over it.

"You must have known yourself that I could never keep—or keep to—anyone," he said at last.

"I know that," she answered; "you don't want to."

It was as if a fine, sharp thorn had pierced him to the heart, and left its point there. The two sat looking at each other without a word.

"And if I would . . ." He grasped her hand earnestly. "Do you think I might dare?"

The girl turned pale, and did not speak.

"Answer me," he said insistently.

"Surely each must know that for himself," she answered at last, speaking with difficulty.

"Kyllikki, Kyllikki, if you only knew!" he cried sorrowfully, and took her hands in his. Then a sudden coldness came over him once more.

"And if I were to dare," he said, "there is one other besides you and me."

"Are you afraid of him?" she asked sharply.

"No. But if he turned me from his door in scorn . . ."

"If the thought of that counts for so much," she said, with emphasis, "then it were better not to ask. For, after—whom would you love more, do you think; yourself, or the one you think you love?"

He winced under her glance.

"If it were for your sake I feared?" he asked, with some feeling.

"No need of that—as long as I know you are sure in your own mind. And if you were sure—you need have no fear for me."

He looked at her in surprise and admiration.

"You are a strange girl, Kyllikki," he said at last. "I am only just beginning to understand you. You are not as I hoped you would be—but you are something more. I know what it must have cost you to say so much. I shall not forget."

Again the trouble rose within him. "You, I understand," he said wearily. "Yes. But myself——"

"You will find that out as well, some day," she said tenderly.

"If only there was time now. . . ." He sat for a moment in thought.

"We are leaving to-morrow afternoon. If I have got things clear in my mind by then, I will come and see you before we go. But it will be at the last minute. For if it comes to what I think it will, then I must not stay a moment longer."

The girl nodded. Both rose to their feet.

"Kyllikki," he said, with emotion, taking her hands, "it may be this is the last time I see you alone. Do not think hardly of me because I am what I am."

"You could not be otherwise," she answered warmly. "I understand."

"I shall be grateful to you for that always. And perhaps . . ." His voice broke. "Good-bye, Kyllikki!"

. . . . . .

It was Sunday afternoon. The lumbermen were getting ready to leave. The young folk of the village, and some of the elders, had come down to the creek at Kohiseva to see them start.

The water was almost clear of timber already, the boom was being dragged slowly down the dead water by a few of the men. Some went ahead, getting odd logs out of the way, others strolled idly about on the shore, exchanging greetings with the villagers.

A little way down the bank a log is stranded with one end thrust far inshore. Close by it lies a pole.

"That's Olof's," says one of the men. "He's not come down yet—busy up at the village, it seems."

A girl in the group of lookers-on felt her heart beat suddenly.

"H'm—left it to ride down on, I suppose. Wants to take another turn down the rapids before he goes."

"Ay, that's it. Likes that way better than going on a raft like ordinary folk. That's him coming down, isn't it?"

Olof came racing down like the wind.

A girl in the group turned pale. She could see from his manner what had passed. Something terrible it must have been to bring him down in a fury like that.

He came nearer. His face was deadly pale, his lips compressed, and his eyes flashed, though he looked out over the water all the time.

He raised his hat as he passed the group, but without a glance at anyone.

"What's happened now?" The question was in all eyes, but no one spoke.

Olof grasped his pole, thrust off the log, and sprang out on it. He took a few powerful strokes, and turned, casting his eyes over the group on the shore. He was looking for one amongst them—and found her.

"Good-bye!" he cried, waving his hat.

"Good-bye—good-bye! Come again some day to Kohiseva!"

The men waved their hats, the girls fluttered kerchiefs in farewell.

Olof was still facing toward the shore, paddling slowly out across the creek.

Those on shore would have sent him a friendly word, but no one spoke—all were looking at a girl whose face was strangely pale.

Paler than ever it seemed as the man stopped rowing, and fixed his eyes on the group.

"Ay, cast your coins in a beggar's hat,
And he'll bless your charity.
I was good enough for the girl I loved,
But her kin were prouder than she!"

There was a depth of bitterness in the words—the listeners started involuntarily.

"What's taken him all at once? Never heard him sing that way before!"

"Sh! Listen!"

The singer glanced down at the water, took a few strokes out, and went on:

"My home is where the rapids roar,
Below the river's brink.
All the rivers of all the world—
Who cares if he swim or sink?"

The listeners glanced at one another—the meaning of the song was growing clear.

"'Twas no spring day that gave me life
With sunlit skies and clear,
But a leafless gloom that sent me forth
To wander many a year.

My mother wept in her garden lone,
Or ever I was born;
Looked at a blood-red flower and wept
For that her heart was torn."

He was midway across now, paddling slowly, bending a little forward. Those on the shore stood still, waiting.

"And that same flower grew red in my way,
And I wished it for my own.
I won but little joy of its bloom
That was in sorrow grown.

But little joy when my father rose
And drove me from his door,
And my mother wept as I went to seek
What sorrow was yet in store."

A girl was crying softly. The rest stood silent.

"O blood-red flower, O flame-red flower,
That ever you grew so red!
Ask of my love if she knows you now,
When all her tears are shed!"

With a wave of his hand the singer turned, and made his way swiftly across the river.

Those on the shore waved in return, and stood watching and waving long, but he did not look back.

WATER-SPRITE AND WATER-WITCH

SLOWLY the river flowed; the waves plashed, and the reeds swayed lightly.

Green pine woods on one shore; the other was field and meadow, with a road running through a little distance from the bank.

A girl came walking down the road, casting an anxious glance now and again towards the river.

She stopped. A boom lay out in the river, lumbermen's poles were strewn about on the farther bank. And something more—a man lay under the trees at the edge of the wood, resting his head on one hand.

The girl looked at him thoughtfully. The man did not move. Still in doubt, she took a step forward, and then drew back again. At last, she turned off from the road, and walked resolutely down along a watercourse straight towards the river.

Mingled emotion stirred in the young man's breast—joy at the meeting, and wounded pride and bitterness. He felt an impulse to hurry across, run to the girl and take her in his arms, forgetting all else. But there was that between them cold and clear as the dividing water.

The girl reached the bank, and stood looking out over the water in silence.

The young man could contain himself no longer. "You have come!" he cried.

"How could I help it?" she said in a low voice—the words hardly carried to the opposite bank.

"And I could not help thinking of you."

The river looked at the pair. "If only I were frozen over!"

. . . . . .

"Couldn't you—couldn't you come across—just for a moment?" asked the girl timidly.

"Just what I was going to do. But we can't stay there on the bank—the men will be coming down directly."

He thought for a moment.

"Will you come over here if I come to fetch you? Then we can go up in the woods where no one can see. Come over on the raft."

"Yes, I could do that!"

He took up his pole and set the raft loose—a couple of tree trunks, no more, fastened together with withies—and rowed hurriedly across to the opposite bank.

"Like a dear sister she comes," he thought to himself, as he helped her on to the raft. The girl held his hands and looked deep into his eyes, but without speaking.

"Sit there on the crosspiece—you can't stand up when it begins to move."

She sat down obediently, and he rowed across.

"I never thought you could be such a friend," he said, as they stepped ashore.

"Friend?" said the girl, with a tender, grateful glance—grateful that he had found the very word for the feeling that had brought her thither, and which had cost her so much already.

. . . . . .

The sun was setting. A youth and a girl walked down from the woods towards the river bank, talking together.

Then suddenly they awoke from their dreams, and looked at each other in dismay. The river was a waste of water only, the banks deserted, the raft gone—neither of them had thought of how they were to get back.

"What are we to do?" The mute question was in the eyes of both.

"You can't get back along this bank?" said the young man at last.

"All through Vaha-Kohiseva village and over the bridge—no. And I ought to bring the calves home, too."

"There's no boat anywhere near?"

"No."

A gleam of resolution shone in the young man's eyes.

"Can you swim?" he asked suddenly, turning towards her.

"Swim?" she repeated in surprise. Then her face lit up as she grasped his meaning. "Yes, indeed!"

"And *would* you swim across with me if I carry your clothes?"

She trembled slightly—it was a daring plan, yet there was a certain secret fascination in the thought.

"With you? Yes!" she cried.

"Good. You can undress here. Then roll up all your clothes in your blouse, and tie it round with the sleeves. I'll go a little way off and get ready. We'll manage all right, you see."

And he strode off with rapid steps.

But the girl flushed, and looked anxiously around, as if she had promised more than she could fulfil. She glanced

along the shore—Olof was sitting a little distance away, with his back to her, already undressing.

"How childish I am!" she thought. And stepping briskly down to the water's edge, she began hastily taking off her clothes.

. . . . . .

A splash in the water—Olof was almost lost to sight in the reeds. He took off his boots and hung them by one lace round his neck, then he fixed his bundle of clothes above, and tied it with the remaining lace.

"Ready?" he called over his shoulder, glancing down the stream.

Hurriedly the girl rolled her garments up in the blouse. Her white body shivered—in womanly embarrassment at her position, and with an ecstatic delight. Then with a splash the white figure dipped beneath the water, swam up, and hid in the reeds.

Olof swam upstream, his eyes fixed on the heap of clothing, and a faint smile on his lips. He took the bundle, tied his belt round it, and fastened it above his own. The double load stood up high above his head.

"They'll be all right now—if I don't make a mess of it," he assured her.

With long, slow strokes he made for the opposite shore. The girl stood motionless in the reeds, watching him as he swam.

"How strong and bold he is!" she thought. "And the wonderful things he does! What does he care for the river? —water between us is nothing to him. He makes everything do his will. How could one be afraid with him?"

"*Her* clothes!" thought Olof. "And I am carrying them."

He reached the bank, untied the girl's bundle, and set it carefully ashore. Then swimming a little farther down, he flung his own things up on land.

"Haven't you started yet?" he called across to the girl—though he had been hoping all the time that she had not.

"No—I was just going to," she replied. "I—I forgot. It was such fun watching you."

"I'll come and meet you, if you like. It'll be safer perhaps. . . ."

"Ye—es," said the girl.

She felt no shame now, though he was looking straight at her. He was filled with the strange delight that comes with any stepping over the bounds of everyday life into a world of fairyland, where all is pure, and nothing is forbidden, where the sense of being *two* that go their own ways unseen is like a purging, fusing flame.

Olof swam rapidly across.

"You look like a water-witch there in the reeds," he cried delightedly, checking his stroke.

"And you're the water-sprite," she answered, with a joyous smile, as she struck out.

"Bravo, water-witch, you're swimming splendidly!" he cried. They were swimming side by side now, straight across the river.

The water rippled lightly about them; now and again the girl's white shoulder lifted above the surface, her long hair trailed behind over the water, that shone like gold in the sunset light.

"Wonderful!" he cried. "I've never seen anything so lovely."

"Nor I!" said the girl.

"Nor we!" laughed the trees behind them.

"Nor we!" nodded the bushes on the bank in front.

"It is like swimming in the river of forgetfulness," he went on. "All the past disappears, all that was bitter and evil is washed away, and we are but two parts of the same beautiful being that surrounds us."

"Yes, it is like that," said the girl, with feeling.

Slowly they came to land.

"It was very narrow, after all," said Olof regretfully, as he turned from her and went down to fetch his clothes. He dressed as quickly as he could, and hurried up to her again.

"Let me wring the water from your hair," he begged.

She smiled permission. The water fell like drops of silver from his hands.

"Must you go now?" asked Olof sadly. "Let me go with you as far as the road at least."

Once more he looked regretfully at the river—as if to fix the recollection in his mind.

They walked up to the road without speaking, and stopped.

"It's ever so hard for me to say good-bye to you," he said, grasping her hands.

"Harder still for me," she answered in a low voice.

"Shall I ever forget you—you, and this evening?"

Her eyelids quivered, and she bowed her head.

"Kyllikki!" he cried desperately. "Would you hide your eyes from me?—Kyllikki . . ." There was hope and doubt in his eyes; he loosed his hold of her hands, and clasped his own as if questioningly about her waist.

The girl was trembling. She laid her hands on his shoulders, and then slowly twined her arms about his neck.

A tumult of delight came over him. He pressed her to

him fervently, lifting her off her feet—her arms drew closer round him.

He saw the look in her eyes change—giddiness seized him, and he set her down.

"May I . . .?" he asked, with his eyes.

Her eyes consented—and their lips met. . . .

When at last he let her go, the girl's face was changed almost beyond recognition. On her under lip showed a tiny drop of blood.

A cry of dismay rose up in him, but remained unuttered. A strange intoxication overpowered him—the red drop there was the seal of a friendship deeper and more mysterious than all else—in a wild kiss he drank the blood from her lip. He felt himself on the point of swooning—and wished the world would end there, in that moment.

He could not speak—he did not know whether to stay or go. A darkness seemed to close about him, and he staggered off like a drunken man, without looking back.

THE CAMP-FIRE AT NEITOKALLIO

A LEAGUE of swift-flowing river, almost straight, with gently sloping meadows, forest-crowned, on either hand.

A grand, impressive sight at all seasons. In autumn, the swollen waters pour down as from a cornucopia; in winter, folk from the town come driving over the frozen flood, racing one against another; in spring, the river overflows its banks, spreading silt on the meadows as in the land of the Nile; and in summer, the haymakers are lulled by the song of the grasshoppers and the scent of the hay to dream of paradise, where the children of men even now may enter in for some few days in every year.

A league of river, a league of meadow land—but at one spot two great rocks stand out as if on guard.

One rises from the very verge, the water lapping its foot as it stands dreaming and gazing over to its fellow of the farther side. Neitokallio is its name.

The other is more cold and proud. It stands drawn back a little way from the bank, with head uplifted as in challenge, looking out through the treetops across the plain. And this is Valimaki.

At the foot of Valimaki a camp-fire was burning. It was midnight. A group of lumbermen were gathered round the fire, some lying stretched out with knapsacks under their heads, some leaning one against another. Blue clouds of smoke curled up from their pipes.

The red fire glowed and glowed, flaring up now and again into bright flame, tinging the fir stems on the slope as if with blood, and throwing weird reflections out on to the dark waters of the river. The men sat in silence over their pipes.

"Look!" said one at last, nodding up towards the head of the rock. "Looks almost as if she was sitting there still, looking down into the river."

Several nodded assent.

"Maybe there *is* someone sitting there."

"Nay, 'tis only a bit of a bush or something. But 'tis the very same spot where she sat, that's true."

"What's the story?" asks one—a newcomer, on his first trip to Nuolijoki. "Some fairy tale or other?"

"Fairy tale?" one of the elders breaks in. "You're a stranger, young man, that's plain to see. 'Tis a true story enough, and not so long since it all happened neither."

"Fourteen years," says Antti, knocking the ashes from his pipe. "I remember it all as plain as yesterday. Ay, there's queer things happen in life."

"Did you see it yourself, then?"

"Ay, I did that—and not likely to forget it. 'Twas on that rock I saw her first time, and a young lad with her."

Some of the men sat up and began filling their pipes afresh.

"Her betrothed, maybe?"

"Ay—or something like it. I didn't know at the time. I was clearing stray logs here on the shore, and saw them sitting up there together, looking at the water. I sat down too for a bit, and lit a pipe, and thinking to myself; well, water's water, and water it'll be for all their looking. Anyhow, I doubt they must look at something, just to pass the time."

"Well, and what then? What happened?"

"Nay, they did but sit there a bit and then went away. But next day again, I was working there same as before, and there's my young miss a-sitting there in the very spot—only nobody with her this time."

Olof had been lying on his back, hands under his head, looking up into the darkness. All at once he sat up, and stared at the speaker.

" 'Twas a queer girl, thinks I, and lights my pipe. Walking all those miles out from the town to sit on a rock—as if there wasn't rocks enough elsewhere. Anyway, 'twas no business of mine. And after that she was there every day—just about midday, always the same time, and always sitting just there in one place."

"But what was she doing there?"

"Doing? Nay, she wasn't doing anything. Just sitting there, and staring like."

" 'Twas Antti she was staring at—that'll be it," laughed one. "You must have been a fine young fellow those days, Antti!"

"You keep your tongue between your teeth, young fellow; 'tis no laughing matter I'm telling you."

The men looked at one another, and nodded. A faint breath of wind sighed through the trees on the slope, a pair of twin stems creaked one against the other with a melancholy sound. The men puffed at their pipes.

"Well, there she sits, and never song nor word to hear. Lord knows what she'd be thinking of all the time. Then one day I came down to the river, and was going over to Metsamantile for some butter. Just passing by the rock I was, and there she is all of a sudden, coming towards me, and all dressed in black from top to toe."

"Ho!"

"I was all taken aback, you can think. She'd a black veil over her face, and all. But a sweet, pretty thing to see, ay, that she was—like a blessed angel. I pulled off my cap, and she looks up at me and nods. And it gave me such a queer sort of feeling, I just turned round and stood staring after her."

"Was it just a young girl?"

"Young? Ay, no more than twenty, at most. Well, I stood there watching her till she's out of sight among the trees. And then it all seemed clear enough. 'Twas her father or mother was dead, no doubt, and that's why she came out here all alone, for comfort, like. Anyway, I was going on. Then, just past the rock there's a man calls out, 'She's gone!'

"I was near falling backwards at that. I called out to see what was the matter, and ran down to the shore.

"'Thrown herself down!' cries out the other man, and goes racing off down to the water.

"We both ran all we could, but there was nothing to see. We waited a bit, but she didn't come up. So I went off to the village, and the other man to the town.

"They got her up after—at the first haul. She'd gone down like a stone to the bottom, just at the spot. But there was no getting her to life again, try all we could. Just as beautiful to look at she was, for all she was dead. Ay, a lovely thing, a lovely thing. We'd had to undo her clothes a bit, trying to bring her round, and her skin—'twas like white silk. Seemed almost a sin to touch her with our rough hands and all. . . ."

. . . . . .

No one spoke for a while.

"And was it just for sorrow, like?" asked one at last.

"Ay, sorrow enough. But 'twas neither father nor mother she was sorrowing for."

"Ah! . . . 'Twas a lover, then? Maybe she'd got into trouble."

"Nay, 'twas none of that sort. Just set on him—the young lad she'd been sitting there with at first—and he'd left her, that was all."

The men sat in silence. Olof's heart was beating so that he almost feared the rest must hear it. His eyelids quivered, and his brow was furrowed deep as he sat staring into the fire.

" 'Tis that way sometimes with fine folk when they're in love," murmured one.

" 'Tis a woman's way altogether," put in another, with an attempt at gaiety, as if to dispel the feeling of gloom. "Their heart's like a flimsy fairing—little watch looks all right, but just shake it a bit, and 'tis all to pieces."

"Maybe 'tis so with fine folk and ladies and such, but peasant girls are not so foolish. More like a grandfather's clock, say. Anything goes wrong, you've only to give it a shake, let it stop for an hour or so, and shake it again, and scold it a bit—and it's as right as ever. Go any way you like."

The men laughed—it was a relief to turn to something lighter.

"Ay, you're right there," put in a stout fellow with a loud voice. " 'Twas so with my old woman once when she was young. Got set on a bit of a greenhorn chap, all soft as butter, and took it badly. But I saw 'twas no good for her

nor anyone, and heaved him out of the way and took her myself. And well I did, for she's never troubled a thought about him since."

A shout of laughter went up from the men. They had recovered their spirits now.

"Ay, you may laugh," said an elderly man. "But 'tis not every man that troubles if what he thinks best is best for a woman herself." He paused a moment, and sat cleaning his pipe with a straw. "There's girls of our own sort that can't be handled that way to any good—and there's both men and girls that don't take things so lightly."

There was an earnest ring in his voice, a note almost of pain, and the men ceased to smile. Olof turned in surprise, and looked at the speaker—some of the others were making signs behind the old man's back.

"I know one man at least," he went on, "that loved a girl when he was young, and couldn't marry her. He didn't go off and kill himself—but it marked him, none the less, for all he was only a peasant himself. Sold his place, he did, and drank away the money, and wandered about the rest of his life to this day—and never forgotten her."

The old man was silent.

"Ay, 'tis plain to see she's in his mind now that he's old and grey," said one who had pointed to the speaker before.

The old man bowed his head, and pulled his cap down over his eyes; but they could see a quiver in his face, and the brass-bound pipe-stem trembled in his hand.

The men exchanged glances; none seemed wishful to speak.

"Ay, 'tis no light thing to play with," said one at last. "And each knows best what he's learned for himself."

Again a sighing of the trees on the hillside, and a mournful sound from the straining stems. The coming dawn threw a grey light on the rocky face of Neitokallio; far over the meadows a bird was calling.

"Getting light—'tis time we were about," said Olof, rising to his feet.

The men stared at him in wonder; his voice was strange and hard as that of the old man who had spoken before.

"Up with you—come!" said Olof, with sudden impatience. And, turning abruptly, he strode down to the shore.

The men stared after him, then, rising, covered their fire, and followed down to the river.

NO! I must live while I am young; breathe freely while I can! But you, Hawthorn—do you know what life is?"

"Yes," the girl answered fervently; "it is love!"

"It is something else besides. Youth and spring and courage—and fate, that brings the children of men together."

"Yes . . .? I wonder why I never thought of that myself."

"What does it matter what we think? We drift along, knowing nothing of one another, like the errant winds or the stars in the skies. We pass by hundreds, without so much as a glance, until fate as in a lightning flash brings us face to face with the one appointed. And then—in a moment we know that we belong to each other, we are drawn together by magnetic force—for good or ill."

"I have felt the same—and I feel it more keenly now than ever," answered the girl, nestling trustingly close to him. "Each minute in your arms is worth more than all the rest of my life before."

"And you are to me as the sap of the trees in spring, that thrills me with ecstasy and makes me forget all else. And I *will* feel it so!—drown my sad autumn and my joyless winter in the delight of spring. And I bless the fate that led you to me—there is none like you!"

"None?" the girl repeated happily, and yet in doubt. "Oh, if only I could be as you think."

"You are so! Every drop of blood in you is love and fire. The lightest touch of your shoe against my foot is more than the warmest embrace from any other—your breath is like a secret caress; you bring a scent of hawthorn with you everywhere that lifts me almost to madness."

"Do not talk like that, Olof. I am nothing—it is you that are all. Tell me—are all lovers as happy as we?"

"No."

"Why not? Is it because they—they can't love as we do?"

"They *dare* not! They fear to be happy. Oh, how blind the world is! Wandering sadly with prayer book and catechism in hand, when love and spring are waiting for all who will. And those who have grown old, when their blood is as lead in their veins, and they can but gaze with beggars' eyes on their own youth—they would have us too slaves of the prayer-book and catechism like themselves."

"Is it really so . . .?"

"Yes, it is true. Only while we are young, only while the flood of youth runs free and bright in our veins can we be happy. And they are the greatest who dare to demand their share of life in full, to plunge unafraid into the waters, letting the waves break on their temples and life's salt flood wash their cheeks."

"And have I dared all this, Olof? Tell me, have I not?"

"Yes, you have. And it is just that which makes you lovely and bewitching as you are. It is a glorious thing to give oneself up entirely to another, without question, without thought of return or reckoning—only to bathe body and soul in the deep wells of life!"

"Yes, yes. . . . And, do you know, Olof . . .?" The girl spoke earnestly, with a quiver in her voice.

"What? Tell me?"

But she could say no more, and, bursting into tears, hid her burning cheek against his breast, her body shaking with sobs.

"What—child, you are crying? What is it?"

"I don't know. . . ." The girl was sobbing still. "Only that I can't—can't give you all I would."

"But you have given me more than I ever dared to hope for!"

"Not so much as I gladly would! Why do you not ask more of me? Tell me to die with you, and I am ready—I could die by fire with you. Or take my life now, here, this moment. . . ."

The fire of her increasing passion seemed to have sent out a spark that glowed and burned in his soul.

"How can you speak so?" he asked, almost in dread. "It is madness, child."

"Madness—yes. But if you knew how I love you. . . Say but one word and I will leave home—father and mother and all—and follow you like a beggar girl from place to place."

"And never care what people said?"

"Care? Why should I care for them? What do they know of love?"

"Little Hawthorn . . ." Olof bent her head back and looked straight into her eyes. "Was that a nice thing to say, now?"

The girl bowed her head. "No—but I wanted to do something, to make some sacrifice for your sake."

She was silent for a moment, then her eyes brightened once more. "Olof, now I know! I'll cut off one of the

prettiest locks of my hair and you shall keep it for remembrance—that's what people do, isn't it? And you must keep it always—and think of me sometimes, even when you love someone else."

"Oh, my love! I don't know whether to laugh or cry when you say such things. But it is only now, in the gloom of the spring night. By daylight you will think differently."

"No, never! Not even in the grave!"

"And then—it's so childish. Must you have a keepsake from me too, to help you to remember?"

"No, of course not."

"Then why should I need one?"

"No, no—it's childish of me, of course. Forgive me, Olof—and don't be sorry any more. I ask nothing but to go on loving you."

"And I you—without thought or question."

"Yes. And I shall remember all my life how happy you have made me; I shall keep the memory of it all as a secret treasure till I die, and bless you. . . ."

She rose up suddenly on her elbow.

"Olof—tell me something. Did you ever hear of anyone dying of happiness?"

"No—I have never heard of it. Why?"

"But when they are really, really happy . . .?"

"I don't think anyone could, even then."

"But they can die of sorrow sometimes, I've heard. And then if one really wants to . . ."

"Hawthorn!" He clasped her in a wild embrace. "There is no one like you in all the world. If *that* were possible, I would ask nothing else."

"Would you—would you really care to . . . with me?"

"Yes, yes . . . to swoon in the scent of you and die . . . to feel the strands of your hair twined round my throat, and die. . . . Well for me if I could, perhaps—and for others. . . ."

SISTER MAYA

SADNESS pervaded his soul, and he spoke to the evening gloom that stole in through the window and hovered about his pale face like a watcher.

"I too should have had a sister—sister Maya," he said dreamily.

"You had one—and the best that one could wish for," said the evening gloom.

"I don't remember—I was too young to know. . . . But mother always spoke so nicely of her . . . the time I was ill, for instance."

"So your mother spoke of that. Yes, yes, she would. . . ."

"It was when I was a child. I was very ill—on the point of death, she said. And mother and all the others were crying, and comforting themselves with the thought that little Olof would be an angel soon, and wear a crown. And sister Maya said then I should sit by her bedside with wings outspread, warding off evil dreams."

"Well if it had been so," said the evening gloom.

"But the girl, my sister, burst into tears, and cried that I should not be an angel, but a big man, bigger than father—ever so big and strong. And she threw her arms round my neck and said no one should ever come and take away Olof—no!"

"Ay," nodded the gloom, "so it was—yes."

"And my sister tried her own way to make me well again

—fondling me and blinking her eyes and stroking me under the chin. And I began laughing, for all that I was ill. And she was all overjoyed at that, and more certain than ever that I was to get well again and grow a big strong man. And I laughed again, and life began laughing too—and after that, I gradually got well."

"Ay, 'twas so. And your sister, she looked after you and nursed you all by herself—no one else was allowed to touch you; yes, that was your sister Maya!"

"Then Maya was taken ill herself. And weak as she was, she would have me near her all the time, and made me sit by her bedside. And I only laughed at it all—I did not understand that my only sister was at death's door. Ay, sometimes I pinched her thin cheek, or pulled her hair, or flicked her ear in play. . . ."

"So you have done since with many other girls—ay, and laughed at them."

"And then the others came and wanted to take me away, out of her sight, because I was so cruel."

"Ay, just so. If only someone had done the same thing afterwards, with the rest. . . ."

"But Maya held my hand and would not let them. And even when she was dying I had to stay there, and with her last words she hoped that Olof would grow up and be a fine strong fellow, and a good man."

He relapsed into thought.

"And now . . . here you are, a fine strong fellow, and . . ." The voice seemed urging him to go on.

"Why did my sister die? Oh, if only she were alive now!"

"Who can say—perhaps it is better for her as it is."

"If she were alive now, she would be in her best years.

And she could live with me, we two together, and never caring about anyone else. Keep house together—and she should be my friend and sister—and all else! I know just what she would look like. Tall and slender, with fair hair, light as the flax at home, and all curling down over her shoulders. And she would carry her head high—not vain and proud, but noble and stately. And her eyes all fire and mischief. Deep eyes, with a reflection of strange worlds, and none could face them with so much as a thought of deceit. Like mother's eyes—only with all, all the fire of youth—almost like Kylli . . ."

"So ho!" laughed the gloom. "So that's what your sister's to be like. . . . Well, go on!"

"And her nature, too, would be strange. Independent, choosing her own way—such a nature as old folks say is no good thing for a lad, far less for a girl. But for her . . . And in winter-time she would come racing home on ski—rushing into the place and making the doors shake. Then she would jump on my lap, put her cold hands on my shoulders, and look mischievously: 'Why, what's this, brother? As gloomy as a monk again, I declare!' And I should feel happier then, but still a little earnest, and say, 'Maya, Maya, what a child you are! As thoughtless as a boy. And such a noise you make about the place.' 'Oh, but you're always in the dumps—sitting here moping like a grey owl. You ought to go out and race through the snow, till it whirls up about your ears . . . that's the thing to freshen you up. . . .' And then she presses cold hands against my cheek, till I shiver, and looks teasingly. And then all my dull humour's gone, and I can't help laughing at her, and calling her a little impudent thing. . . ."

Olof stopped, and smiled—as if to fix the picture of this bright young creature indelibly in his mind.

The voice of the gloom spoke again: "So she is to live just for *your* pleasure—like all the others?"

The smile died from the young man's face.

"Go on—your sister is sitting on your lap, looking mischievously into your eyes . . .?"

"No, no—not like that—no. She looks earnestly, with eyes that no deceit can face, and says, 'Olof, what's this they are saying about you . . .?'

" 'Saying—about me . . .?'

"And she looks at me still. 'Hard things they say, brother—that you play with women's hearts. . . . Is it true?'

"And I cannot meet her eyes, and bow my head.

" 'Olof—remember that *I too am a woman.*'

"And that cuts me to the heart. 'Sister, sister, if you knew it all; if you knew how I have suffered myself. I never meant to play with them—only to be with them—as I am with you.'

" 'As you are with me?' She looks at me wonderingly. 'But you know—you must know—that you cannot be as a brother to them.'

" 'Yes, I can—sometimes.'

" 'But never quite. And still less can they be sisters to you. Surely you know enough to understand that.'

" 'No!'

" 'But you should know. Oh, think! With some men, perhaps, they might be as sister and brother—but not with you. You, with your dark eyes—I have always feared them. They beckon and call . . . to evil and disaster.'

" 'Sister—what must you think of me!' And I hide my head in her lap, as I used to do in mother's.

" 'I am only sorry—bitterly sorry for you. And I can't help being fond of you, for I know your heart is good and pure—but you are weak; very, very weak.' And she strokes my forehead, as mother used to do.

" 'Yes, I am weak, I know it. But I promise you . . .'

" 'Don't promise!' she says almost sternly, and lifts a finger warningly. 'How many times have you promised, with tears in your eyes, and done the same again? Don't promise—but try to be stronger.'

" 'I will try, sister—dear, dear sister.' And I take her hands and kiss them gratefully again and again. . . ."

"Ho! so that's the way you talk together, is it?" said the gloom. "Well, I'm not sure it might not be a good thing if your sister were alive. Then, perhaps, if she talked like that to you occasionally, you might be a different man altogether."

The young man sat for a while in thought.

"Then suddenly she jumps up and lights the lamp—it is getting dark. And she comes and puts her hands on my shoulders and says, 'Let me help you checking those accounts—you know I can.'

"And she sits down at the table, and I watch her little hand gliding over the paper. And I set to work at the books, and so we work for a long time.

"Then suddenly she looks up, and begins talking again. 'Why, what a great man you're getting, Olof—keeping the books in an office of your own—and with a secretary into the bargain. There's never a lumberman risen so far at your

age, and never a foreman that looks so fine, with office and clerk and all.'

"And I laugh at that. 'And never one with such a sister to help—that I'm sure.'

"Then she turns serious again, and looks at me strangely. I can't make out what she means.

" 'Tell me,' she says at last, 'how long are you going to go on with this wandering life? It's three years now.'

" 'Is it so long as that?' I ask in surprise. ' 'Twill be longer yet, I doubt.'

" 'If I were you, I would make an end of it at once. Let us both go home and take over the farm there—mother and father have worked so hard there all their lives—it's time they were allowed to rest.'

"I look at her without speaking, and she understands. 'Father? Never fear—he's forgotten his anger long ago. And mother and he are both waiting for you to come home—for brother Heikki is too young to take over the place. . . .'

" 'Do you really think so?'

" 'Think? I know! And there's any amount of work all waiting for you. New ground to be sown, and a new barn to build, and we ought to have three times the stock we have now. And there's all Isosuo marsh—you've that to drain and cultivate. When are you going to begin?'

" 'Drain the marsh? How could you think of that?'

" 'Why shouldn't I? I'm your sister. It will be a big piece of work—father himself never ventured to try it—but you're a bigger man than your father—a big, strong man . . .'

" 'Sister! Now I simply must give you a kiss. There's no one like you in all the world.'

"And we go home the very next week. And all turns out

just as you said—more live stock, new ground sown, clover where there was but marsh before, and Koskela is grown to a splendid place, known far and wide. And we are so happy—with you to keep house and me to work the land. And the years go by and we grow old, but our children . . .

". . . Oh, misery! What am I dreaming of . . .?"

"That was the best of your dreams so far," said the gloom, with a full glance of its coal-black eyes. "May it soon come true! But light your lamp now—it is dark as night in here now."

CLEMATIS

IF I were a poet, I would sing—a strange, wild song.

"And if I could string the quivering *kantele,* I would play on it a melody to my song.

"I would sing of you, and of love. Of clematis with the snow-white flowers. For you are as the clematis, my love, sweet and beautiful as its blossoms, dear as its growth about the windows of a home—and deep, endlessly deep, as life itself."

"But that is just what you are doing, Olof—for all you say is like a poem and a song," answered the girl. "Sing for me again—and let me just sit here at your feet and listen."

"Ah, if only you could sit there always, as now. Clematis—how strange that I should meet you—when I never thought to meet with any flower again—saw only the yellow faded leaves of autumn everywhere around."

"Autumn . . . faded leaves . . ." The girl looked at him, timidly questioning. "Olof, don't be angry with me. But . . . Have you loved others before? They say so many things about you."

The young man was silent a moment.

"Ay, there are many things to say, perhaps," he murmured sadly. "But you, Clematis—could you care for me; could you not love me altogether, if you knew I had loved another before?"

"No, no—'twas not meant so," said the girl hastily, touching his knee with a slight caress. "I was not thinking of myself . . ."

"But of . . .?"

They looked at each other in silence.

"Yes—I know what you mean. I can read it in your eyes." He laid one hand tenderly on the girl's head.

"Life is so strange. And human beings strangest of all. I have loved—but now I feel as one that had only dreamed strange fancies."

"But have you loved them really—in earnest? I mean, did you give them all you had to give—and can anyone give that more than once in life?" The girl spoke softly, but with such deep feeling that the young man found no words to answer, and sat silently staring before him.

"Who can tell," he said, after a while. "I thought I had given all I had long since, and had all that could ever be given me. I felt myself poor as the poorest beggar. Then you came, unlike all the others, a wealth of hidden treasure in yourself—none had ever given me what you gave. And now—I feel myself rich, young and unspoiled, as if I were crossing the threshold of life for the first time."

"Rich—ay, you are rich—as a prince. And I am your poorest little slave, sitting at your feet. But how can anyone ever be so rich—how can it be? I can never understand."

"Do you know what I think? I think that human beings are endlessly rich and deep, like Nature itself, that is always young, and only changes from one season to another. All that has happened to me before seems now only the rising of sap in spring. Now summer comes for the first time—all calm and warmth and happiness. I have been like a fairy

palace, with a splendid hall to which none could find the key. But you had it all the time—the others could enter this little room or that, but only you had the key to the best of all."

"Is it really true, Olof? Oh, I shall remember those words for ever!"

"It is true—you were the first that taught me how deep and mysterious, how wonderful, the love of a man and a woman can be. That it is not just a chance meeting, and after that all kisses and embraces and overflow of feeling. But a quiet, calm happiness in the blood, like the sap in the trees, invisible, yet bearing all life in itself; speechless, yet saying everything without a single touch of our lips."

"Yes," said the girl earnestly. "But did you not know that before? I have always felt it so."

"No—I did not realise that it was so intimate a part of our nature; that it was the foundation of life and happiness for all on earth. Now at last I understand that we are nothing without one another—we are as earth without water, trees without roots or mould; or as the sky without sun and moon. And I know now much that I did not know before—the secret of all existence, the power that sustains us all."

"And you know that it is *love*—the greatest of all! But why does no one ever speak of it—I mean, of love itself, not merely the name?"

"I think it must be because it is too deep and sacred a thing to talk about; we do not understand it ever until we have experienced it each for himself. And those that have—they must be silent—for it is a thing to live on, not to talk about. Do you know, I have just remembered something I

once saw. Just a scene in a poor little hut—but it explains it all. . . ."

"Something you have seen yourself?"

"Yes. It was many years ago. It was a cold winter day, and I came to this hut I was speaking of—'twas a miserable place to look at. The windows were covered with frost, and an icy draught came through cracks in the walls. Two children were sitting by the stove, warming their feet that were all red with cold; the other two were quarrelling over the last crust of bread."

"Were they so poor as that?" asked the girl, her voice quivering with sympathy.

"Poor as could be. And in a heap of rags on the bed lay the mother, with a newborn child—the fifth. The man was sitting at the table. He looked at the children on the floor, and then at the mother and her little one in bed—looked at them—and laughed! And the joy in his pale, thin face—it was a wonderful sight. . . ."

"And the mother?" asked the girl eagerly. "Was she happy too—more than he?"

"Yes, she laughed too for joy at everything—the children, and the rags, and the draughty hut, and all. And I was so astounded I didn't know where to look. Happy—in all that misery and wretchedness! Were they so utterly without feeling, then, that they could not cry? But now I understand it all. I know what made those poor folk happy in it all: they had found that thing we spoke of—the great secret. And it made the hut a palace for them, and the ragged children as dear as those of any king and queen—yes, they were happy."

The two sat in silence for a while. Olof felt a slight thrill pass through the girl's body to his own.

"I see it now," said the girl at last. "A little while ago I could not see what it was that made life so deep and wonderful. And do you know, Olof—I should like to be just such a poor woman as that—frost on the windows and rags for a bed, but . . . but . . ." Bright tears shone in her eyes.

"But—what?" he asked tenderly, taking her head in his hands.

"But with the one I loved—to be mine—all mine, for ever!" she answered, looking straight into his eyes.

Olof started. It was as if something had come between them, something restless and ill-boding that broke the soft swell of the waves on which they drifted happily—something, he knew not what, that made its presence felt.

"Or—not that perhaps—but to have something of his—something he had given me—to lie beside me in a bed of rags and smile," said the girl. And laying her head in his lap she clung to him as if her body had been one with his.

. . . . . .

The lamp was lit, and a little fire was burning on the hearth. The girl sat on the floor, as was her way, holding her lover's feet in her lap—wrapped in her apron, as if they were her own.

"Go on working—I won't disturb you," she said, "only sit here and warm your feet and look at you."

Olof gave her a quick, warm glance, and turned to his work again.

"Olof," said the girl, after a pause, "what shall I have to hold in my lap when you are gone?"

She looked up at him helplessly, as if he alone could aid her.

Olof made a movement of impatience, as if he had made an error in his reckoning that was hard to put right.

"Nothing, I suppose," he said at last, trying to speak lightly. "You had nothing before, you know."

"Ah, but that was different. Now, I must have something."

There was a strange ring in her voice—the young man laid down his pen and sat staring into the fire. It was like talking to a child—a queer child, full of feeling, knowing and imagining more than its elders often did. But still and for ever a child, asking simple questions now that were hard to answer without hurt.

The girl watched him anxiously.

"Don't be angry, Olof," she said entreatingly. "It's very silly of me, I know. Go on with your work, and don't bother about me. Do—or I shall be so sorry."

"You are so quick to feel things," said he, pressing her hand. "I'll talk to you about it all another time—do you understand?"

"Yes—another time. Don't think any more about it now."

But the words echoed insistently in his ears, with a hollow ring—as if he had spoken carelessly, to be rid of a child's questioning for the time. He took up his pen again, but could not work, only sat drawing squares and interrogations on the margin of the paper.

The girl moved closer, laid her cheek against his knee, and closed her eyes. But her mind was working still, and the light of a sudden impulse shone in her eyes when she looked up at him.

"Olof," she asked eagerly, "are you very busy?"

"No—no. What then?" From the tone of her voice he knew she had something important to say.

"There was just an old story that came into my mind—may I tell it to you, now?"

"Yes, yes, do," said Olof, with a sense of relief. "You are the only girl I have ever met who could tell fairy tales—and make them up yourself too."

"This is not one I made up myself. I heard it long ago," she answered.

"Well, and how does it begin?" said Olof briskly, taking her hands. "'Once upon a time . . .'?"

"Yes, those are the very words. Once upon a time there was a boy—and a girl. And they loved each other— especially the girl. No words could ever tell how she loved him." She looked at Olof as if to see the effect of what she had said.

"That begins well. Go on," said Olof. But a thought was slowly taking form in his mind.

"And they sat in the woods, under the tall birches, and talked of how happy they were. But the girl could not have the boy for her own—they had to say good-bye. He had to go away, and she knew she would never see him again."

Olof looked thoughtful—the fancy was taking root. "Go on—what happened then?"

"Then, just as he was going away, the girl said to him, 'Set a mark on me somehow, so that I shall always feel I belong to you, and no one can tear you from my heart.'

"The boy thought for a moment. 'Where shall I set the mark?' he asked.

"'Here, above my heart,' said the girl.

"And she bared her breast, and the boy took out his knife

and with its sharp point scratched a little heart on her breast."

The girl shivered a little.

"And then he coloured it where he had cut, like sailors do with anchors on their arms. And when he had finished, he kissed it. And they said good-bye, and he went away."

Olof was touched—now he understood. . . .

"And what then?" he asked softly. "What happened after, to the girl with a mark above her heart, and to him that made it?"

"The boy . . ." She stopped, at a loss, and then went on: "There's no more about him in the story. He went away. Only about the girl. . . ."

"Yes, yes, of course," said Olof. "He went away. And the girl?"

"The girl—she looked at the mark every night when she undressed, and every morning when she dressed herself, for she felt as if he were there all the time, because of the mark. But then the time came when her parents said she must marry. And she didn't want to, but she had to all the same. But she did not love her husband, and was always looking secretly at the mark her lover had made, as if she were talking with him that way, and it made her happy."

"And the husband," asked Olof eagerly, "did he find out?"

"No. Men don't notice things like that as a rule. But then the girl bore a child—she was still a girl, for she had remained true to her lover. And the child had the very same mark in the same place.

"The husband saw the mark. 'What's this?' he asked in a stern voice.

" 'Tis a birth-mark,' said the girl.

" 'Do not lie to me!' cried the man. 'It is more than that. Let me see your breast.'

"Now the girl did not want to do this, for she felt that the mark was nothing to do with him. But her husband's face grew dark with anger, and he tore away her clothes, and bared her breast. And now she would not try to hide the mark at all, but stood up straight and let him see. And before he could even ask, she told him what it was. 'That is the mark my lover made when I was a girl,' she said. 'For a sign that I should belong to him for ever—and I have.' And at that the husband's eyes flashed, and without a word he drew his knife and struck it through the mark deep into her breast. . . ."

She would have said more, but her voice failed—she could feel Olof's knees trembling against her breast.

"You are good at telling stories," said he in a stifled voice. "But the end was too horrible."

"It was not horrible at all," she replied. "It was just as lovely as could be. The girl herself could have wished for nothing better. She died with a smile on her lips, as only those who are happy ever die.

"But it is not all ended yet—there is more to come."

"More?" cried Olof in surprise, at a loss to understand how she would go on.

"Yes," she continued. "For when she was dead, the girl came to the gate of heaven. And there stood St. Peter at the gate, as he always does.

" 'You cannot enter in,' said St. Peter, 'for you bear on your breast the mark of sinful lust.' But God heard it from His throne, and cried, 'Open and let her in!' And God

looked at the girl's breast, and she did not flinch. 'You should know better,' He said to St. Peter reproachfully. 'Here is one that was faithful to her first love. . . . Enter in, My child.' "

Both were silent. A little blue flame rose from the embers on the hearth.

"Thanks, Clematis," whispered Olof, and kissed her hands that lay hot in his own. "I know what you meant. And how prettily you said it!"

"Are you sure you knew what I meant?" she asked. "I hadn't finished, you know. . . ."

"What—not finished yet?"

"No!"

She drew her hands away, and as if summing up all she had said before, she clasped his knees and looked imploringly into his eyes.

"Give me that mark!"

Olof shivered—waves of heat and cold seemed passing through his body.

"No, no—my love! You must not ask that of me—it is more than I can do," he went on bitterly.

"You can, if you only will. Love can do all things."

"But now—after what you have said . . ."

"But you said yourself it was so pretty."

"Yes—there is a lovely thought in it—but the end was too horrible—you know what I mean."

"That was the loveliest of all. Oh, won't you do what I ask?" Her lips trembled, and she looked at him entreatingly.

Olof sighed deeply; drops of sweat stood out on his forehead. "How can I refuse you anything? But—but I could never forget it if I did, and . . ."

"Oh . . . I almost thought that was how it would be. You cannot understand—for you are not me. But something I must have!" she went on passionately. "I cannot live without. Look!" She drew from her breast a little case of blue silk, hung by a red cord round her neck. "See—it just reaches to there!"

"It's very pretty," said Olof in relief, taking the case in his hand. "And you want something to put in it?"

"Yes."

"A lock of hair or something? Are you as childish as all that?"

"No—not as childish as all that."

"A flower, then—or what?"

"No, nothing like that."

"You want me to write something, then?"

"No, no. I want yourself—your very self!"

Olof looked at her blankly—he could not guess what was in her mind. He felt himself more and more in the power of something he had been striving to escape.

"Oh, don't you understand? Your portrait."

"But—but I have only one. And—I have never given anyone my portrait."

"No," said the girl confidently. "You have kept it for me."

Olof felt himself shamed. What a poor creature he was grown! Why could he not rise up and take this strange rare child in his arms, and swear by all he revered that she had touched his inmost heart, that he was hers alone, for ever?

He sprang to his feet, and cried earnestly, "Yes! It was taken for you, and for no other!"

But the words ended in a sob—it was as if his blood were turned to sand. With trembling fingers he took out the portrait, and sank down as if paralysed into his seat.

The girl watched him with a starry gleam of ecstasy in her eyes.

But he could not meet her glance—he bent his head, thinking bitterly to himself, "What have I come to? Why do I cheat her and myself, why do I give these beggar's crumbs to one that should have all?"

The girl sat still with the same light of wonder in her eyes, looking now at the portrait, now at Olof himself.

"Yes, it is really you," she said at last, and touching the picture with her lips, she laid it in the case, and slipped it into her bosom.

"Now I have nothing more to ask," she said. "I shall thank you all my life for this. When you are gone, you will be with me still. I can talk to you at night before I sleep, and in the morning you will be the first thing I see. I can whisper to you just as I used to do. And when I am dead, you shall be buried with me."

Olof was overwhelmed with emotion—it was as if something within him had been rent asunder. He looked at the girl's face—how pure and holy it was! Why could not he himself be as she was? What was it that had happened to him?

He felt an impulse to throw himself on the floor at her feet and tell her all—and then rise up young and pure and whole again, able to feel as others did. But he could not; an icy voice within him told that the days of his spring-time were gone for ever. And as he felt her arms about him once

more, he could only bend down humbly and touch her hair with his lips in silence, as if begging her to understand.

Warm drops were falling on his knees, warm drops fell on her hair. Welling from deep sources—but unlike, and flowing different ways.

DARK FURROWS

SUNDAY morning—a calm and peaceful time.

Olof was up, and sat combing his hair before the glass.

"Those wrinkles there on the temples are getting deeper," he thought. "Well, after all, I suppose it looks more manly."

He laid down the comb, turned his head slightly, and looked in the glass again.

"Paler, too, perhaps," he thought again. "Well, I'm no longer a boy. . . ."

He moved as if to rise.

"Look once more—a little closer," urged the glass.

Olof brushed his moustache and smiled.

"Can't you see anything?" the glass went on, with something like a sneer. "Under the eyes, for instance?"

And suddenly he saw. The face that stared at him from the glass was pale, and marked by the lines and wrinkles of those past years. And under the eyes were two dark grey furrows, like heavy flourishes to underline a word.

"Is it possible?" he cried, with a shudder.

"Is it any wonder?" said the glass coldly.

. . . . . .

The face in the glass was staring at him yet, with the dark furrows under the eyes.

"But what—how did they come there?" asked Olof in dismay.

"Need you ask?" said the glass. "Well, you have got your 'mark,' anyhow—though it was not one you asked for."

. . . . . .

The face in the mirror stared at him; the dark furrows were there still. He would have turned his head away, or closed his eyes, but could not. He felt as if some great strong man were behind him with a whip, bidding him sternly "Look!"

And he looked.

"Look closer—closer yet!" commanded his tormentor. "A few deep lines—and what more?"

Olof looked again. The plainer furrows tailed off into a host of smaller lines and tiny folds, this way and that, there seemed no end to them. And again he shuddered.

"Count them!" cried the voice behind him.

"Impossible—they—they are so small!"

"Small they may be—but how many are there?"

Olof bent forward and tried to count.

"Well?"

No answer.

"How many are there?" thundered the voice—and Olof saw the whip raised above his head.

"Nine or ten, perhaps," he answered.

"More! And what do they mean? Can you tell me that?"

"No."

"No? Then let me tell you, that you may know henceforward. The first . . .?"

"I—I don't know."

"You know well enough. Bright eyes—that is the first."

He flinched involuntarily as under the lash. And now the strokes followed sharply one on another.

"A fine figure and curling hair . . . tears and empty promises . . . a thirst for beauty . . . false brotherhood . . . selfishness and the desire for conquest . . . dying voices of childhood . . . dreams and self-deceit . . ."

"Enough!"

"Not yet. There are little extras that you have not called to mind."

"Leave me in peace!" cried Olof almost threateningly.

"You could not leave yourself in peace. Look again—what more—what more?"

"Go!" Olof sprang up with a cry like that of a wounded beast, took the mirror and flung it against the stove, the pieces scattering with a crash about the floor. His blood boiled, his eyes burned with a dark, boding gleam.

"And what then?" he cried defiantly. "My mark? Why, then, let it be. I'll go my own way, mark or no mark."

He picked up his hat and hurried out.

TO THE DREGS

AND now—I'll drink it to the dregs!

"Why not? I've tasted the rarest wine in cups of purest crystal—why not swallow the lees of a baser drink from a tavern stoup? 'Tis the last that drowns regret. Others have done so—why not I?

"Once we have tasted, we must drink—we must dip down into the murky depths of life if we are to know it to the full—ay, drink with a laugh, and go on our way with lifted head!

"Drink to the dregs—and laugh at life! Life does not waste tears over us!"

Olof strode briskly out toward a certain quarter of the town, a complex of narrow streets and little houses with stuffy rooms, where glasses are filled and emptied freely, and men sit with half-intoxicated women on their knees, sacrificing to insatiable idols.

It was a summer evening, bright and clear. The noise of day had ceased, and few were abroad. It seemed like a Sunday, just before evening service, when all were preparing for devotion, and he alone walked with workaday thoughts in his mind.

A narrow door with a grating in the centre. Olof stood a moment, evidently in doubt, and walked on—his heart was thumping in his breast. The consciousness of it irritated him, and turning back impatiently, he knocked loudly at the door.

No sound from within. He felt as if thousands of eyes

were watching him scornfully, and for a moment he thought of flight. He knocked again, hurriedly, nervously.

A pause that seemed unendurably long, then a sound of movement and steps approaching the door—the panel was moved aside.

"What's all the noise about?" cried a woman's shrill voice. "In a hurry, aren't you? Get along, and that quick—off with you!" The panel closed with a slam.

The blood rushed to Olof's cheeks; for a moment he felt like breaking down the door and flinging it into the street—he would gladly have pulled the house down in his fury.

Wondering faces appeared here and there at the windows. They were looking at him as if he were a criminal—a burglar trying to force an entry in broad daylight. Half-running, he hastened back to the main streets of the town. Then the fury seized him again—a passion of wounded pride and defiance. "Am I to be taken for a boy?" he said to himself angrily.

He passed a row of waiting cabs. One of the men touched his cap inquiringly, but Olof shook his head—the fellow had an honest face. The last in the row gave him what he sought—a sly red face with shifty eyes.

"Eh? Take you? . . . That's easy enough! I know the very house. First-rate girls, all of them, and no trouble. 'Tis the best sort you'll be wanting, I take it?"

"Yes."

"That's the style. Just step in, now, and we'll be there. . . ."

The cab rumbles away; Olof leans back, feeling himself again.

. . . . . .

Through a gateway into a cobbled yard. The driver gets down, and Olof follows suit. The man knocks with the handle of his whip at a door.

" 'Tis no good coming at this time—the girls aren't here yet." And the door is slammed in his face.

"Drive on, then! Drive to the devil, only let's get out of this," cries Olof.

"Nay, nay, no call to give up now we're on the way." The driver swings out into the street again, and tries another entrance of the same sort farther on.

Olof stood half-dazed, waiting.

This time the knock was answered by a girl's voice, bright and pleasant. The driver and the girl exchanged whispers through the door. "Sober? Ay, he's sober enough. Young chap, and plenty of money—wants the best sort."

Olof's blood boiled. Was he to be bargained for like a beast in the cattle market? He was on the point of calling the man away, when the door opened a little. "Right you are, then," said the man, with a knowing gleam in his eyes.

"Good evening—won't you come in?" A young girl, neatly dressed, held the door open for Olof with a smile.

He went through the passage into a little parlour. The heavy-scented air of the place was at once soothing and exciting to his senses.

"Sit down, won't you? But what are you looking so serious about? Has your girl thrown you over—or what?"

"Now, how on earth did you guess that?" cried Olof in sudden relief, thankful that the girl was so bright and talkative. He felt all at once that he too must talk—of anything, nothing, or he could not stay in the place a minute.

"Guess? Why, that's easy enough. They always come here when there's anything wrong with—the others. And there's always something wrong with some of them. Was she pretty?" The girl looked at him with a mischievous gleam in her eyes.

"Pretty?—yes, that she was, pretty as you, nearly."

"Puh!" laughed the girl. "And she kissed you, I suppose?"

"No. Wouldn't even kiss me."

"Aha. So you made love to another girl, and then she threw you over—that was it, I'm sure."

"Right again! Yes—made love to another girl—that was it. And quite enough too."

"Oh, it's always the way with—well, that sort of girls. They don't understand how to make love a bit. There's heaps of love to be had, if you only know where to look for it."

They both laughed—the girl in easy, teasing gaiety, Olof still thankful at finding it so easy to suit himself to his company.

"What'll you have to drink? Sherry, madeira, or stout, perhaps? I like sherry best."

"Let's have all three!" cried Olof.

"That'll be twenty, please." He gave her the money and she slipped from the room.

Olof looked round. How was this going to end? He was thankful at any rate that the room was neatly, almost tastefully furnished, and that the girl was so easy to talk to.

The bottles and glasses were brought in. "Here's to us both!" cried the girl, lifting her glass with an enticing glance.

They drank—it was the first time Olof had ever tasted wine. And all the bitterness and unrest in his soul seemed drowned at once.

"I say—is this your first time?" The girl explained her question with a meaning glance.

"Yes." The word stuck in his throat. "Have some more to drink," he added hastily.

"That's right!" The glasses rang. "Got any cigarettes?"

Each lit a cigarette. The girl leaned back in a careless posture, throwing one leg over the other, and watched the smoke curling up in the air.

"First-rate institution, isn't it?" she said, with a laugh. "Sort of public sanatorium—though the fools of police or Government or whatever you call it won't make it free. All you men come here when you're tired and worried and ill, and we cure you—isn't that it?"

"I dare say. . . ."

"But it is, though, take my word for it. How'd you ever get on without us, d'you think? Like fish out of water! And yet we're reckoned as outcasts and all that. Devil take all your society women, I say. There's one I see pass by every day, a judge's wife, haughty and stuck up as a weathercock on a church spire. Think she'd look at one of us? But her husband, bless you, he . . ."

"For Heaven's sake talk of something else," cried Olof. He swallowed a glass of sherry to cover his disgust.

"Eh? Oh, all right, anything you please. Sing you a song if you like. What d'you say to that?"

"Yes, but nothing . . ."

"Not a word. Dainty little song. Here you are:

"'Here's a corner for you and me,
Room for two—but not for three!
A glass for each within easy reach . . .
Just the place for a spree!'

"How's that? Quite nice, isn't it?"

"Go on." Olof settled down more comfortably; there was something pleasantly fascinating in the dance-like rhythm of the song.

"Cushions are soft, and curtains hide,
—What would somebody say if they spied?
Kisses and laughter—and what comes after . . .?
Ah . . .
You never know till you've tried!"

Olof could not help laughing.

They sat laughing and talking and telling stories—the girl was never silent for a moment. The glasses were filled and emptied, the smoke grew thicker.

"Oh . . . it's too hot. I'm stifling with all these things on!" The girl rose to her feet, her eyes glittered, her cheeks were flushed with wine. "I'll be back in a second." And she slipped through into the adjoining room.

"Do, if you like." Olof sank back idly on the sofa, watching the smoke from his cigarette thoughtfully. Still he was not quite at home in the place.

The girl came in like a vision, tripping daintily in light slippers, her arms bare to the shoulder, her body scarcely veiled by the thinnest, transparent wrap.

"Oh!" Olof could not repress an exclamation.

"Ah . . .!" The girl laughed mischievously. Watching his face with a coquettish smile, she lifted one foot gracefully on to the sofa, and leaned towards him, her eyes boldly questioning.

Olof felt his senses in a whirl. He saw in her a mingling of human being, beast and angel, of slave and mistress—a creature fascinating and enticing, bewitching, ensnaring. But only for a moment. His mood changed to one of fury at his own susceptibility; the burning thirst in the girl's eyes, the fumes of wine in her breath, repelled him.

"Sit down and drink—and let that be enough!" He snatched a bottle hastily and filled the glasses to the brim.

"Ho!" said the girl, with a stare. "Drink—is that all you've come for?"

"Yes!"

She stepped down from the sofa, her features quivering with scorn.

"Well, you're a nice one, you are. If they were all like that—drink and pay the bill and off again—and not so much as a . . . well, you're the first I've met of that sort —hope you'll enjoy it!"

She drank, and set down the glass, a sneer still quivering about the corners of her mouth.

Then, leaning her elbows on the table, she gazed at him thoughtfully under her lowered lashes. Olof smoked furiously, till his cigarette looked like a streak of fire.

The girl sat down on the sofa, at the farther end, and went on with a maudlin tenderness in her voice:

"Why are you like that—a man like you? I wouldn't now for money, whatever you offered me. Can't you see I'm in love with you? Or d'you suppose perhaps a girl—a girl in a place like this—can't love? Ah, but she can, and more than any of the other sort, maybe. I'd like to love a real man just for once—I've had enough of beasts. Stay with me to-night—won't you . . .?"

Olof shuddered in disgust.

"Drink!" he cried. "Drink, and don't sit there talking nonsense."

Then again a revulsion seized him, and with a feeling of despair and weakness, he went on:

"I can't stay here, I must go—I must go in a minute. Never mind. Drink."

"Oh, let's drink, then," said the girl bitterly, and, rising, emptied her glass. "Drink—yes, and drink and drink—'tis the only thing when once you're—here." She sank down into a seat. "Night and day, morning and night—there's none of us could stand it if it wasn't for that stuff there. Ho, the world's a mad place—what a fool I am!"

She burst into tears, and fell forward with her arms on the table.

Olof felt more miserable than before. The blood was pulsing in his temples, and something choking in his throat, as he looked at the sobbing figure.

"I'll tell you what this place is," she said, looking up between sobs. "'Tis hell—and in hell you're always wanting something to wet the tip of your tongue—I've read that somewhere, haven't I? Oh, oh . . .!" She fell to sobbing again.

Olof felt he could bear it no longer. He would have liked to comfort her, but his tongue was dry, he could not speak.

Then suddenly the girl jumped up and struck the table with her fist, shaking the things on the tray. "What the hell am I snivelling about—'twon't make it any better." She took the bottle of beer, filled a tumbler and drank it off at a draught, then flung the glass crashing against the wall behind the stove.

"Puh! Now I've got that wretched fit again." She stood in the middle of the room, looking round. "I can't help it, I get like that every now and then. Wait a bit, and I'll bring you better company. A real good girl—she's younger than me, and only just beginning, but she's lovely, lovely as an angel. Only don't go and fall in love with her, or I'll be jealous."

"No! Stay where you are!" Olof would have stopped her, but she was out of the door in a moment. He rose to his feet, his head was throbbing, and he could hardly stand.

"Here you are—here's the beauty!"

A bright-eyed girl, young and slightly built, stood in the doorway smiling.

Olof started as if he had seen a ghost, the blood seemed to stand still in his veins; a cold weight seemed crushing him like an iceberg.

"You—Gazelle!" he cried in horror.

"Olof!"

"Oh, so you're old friends, it seems? Well, then, shake hands nicely. Come along, man, give her a kiss . . ."

Olof felt the room growing dark before his eyes.

The girl turned deathly pale. She stood a moment, trembling from head to foot, then turned and fled. There was the sound of a key drawn from a lock, a door was slammed, and then silence.

Olof stood as if rooted to the spot, seeing nothing but a vague glimmer of light through a rent in blackness. Then at last he pulled himself together, snatched up his hat, and rushed out of the place as if pursued by demons.

. . . . . .

Morning found him seated on a chair by the window, look-

ing out. The night had been cold. Before him lay a group of housetops, the dark roofs covered with a thin white coating of rime; beyond, a glimpse of a grey, cold sky.

He had been sitting thus all night, deep in thought. His road seemed ending here in a blank wall—or he was grown suddenly old, and could go no farther—or was trying vainly to rise from a bed of sickness. His eyes burned, his head was heavy as lead, and his heart seemed dead and cold, as hands and feet may do in winter when on the point of freezing.

He rose to his feet, and bathed his face again and again with cold water. Then he straightened his hair, put on his clothes, and went out.

He took his way direct to a certain street, reached the house he was seeking, and knocked. There were people moving in the yard, and some children about; but he felt no shame, and knocked as easily as if it had been a church door.

The panel opened, and the harsh voice of an old woman asked:

"What d'you want here at this hour? The girls are not up yet."

"When will they be up?"

"In a couple of hours or so."

He looked at his watch, and went out into the street. For a while he wandered up and down, then took the road out from the town, and went straight on.

When he came back his face was pale; his feet were so weary he could hardly drag himself along.

He knocked again; the panel was thrust aside, and a face peeped through, then the door was opened.

"Hallo!" It was the girl of the night before. She was half-dressed, her eyes dull, her face tired and haggard. Olof felt as if he were breathing in the fumes of beer and wine and all unspeakable nastiness.

"Your friend—is she up yet? I want to see her," he stammered.

"Up—ay, she's up long ago; you can see for yourself."

She vanished down the passage, and returned in a moment with a crumpled sheet of notepaper, which she handed him.

Olof glanced at it, and read, hastily scribbled in pencil, these words:

"When you get this I shall be far away. I am going and not coming back. I can't stay here.—ELLI."

"There—what's the meaning of that, if you please?" cried the girl.

Olof made no answer. He held the paper in a trembling hand, and read it again and again; a weight seemed lifted from his shoulders.

"May I—may I keep this?" he asked, with flushing cheeks.

"Keep it—ay, eat it, if you like."

"Good-bye—and—and . . ." He pressed the girl's hand, as if unconscious of what he was doing.

The girl watched him as he hurried away.

"Queer lot," she murmured. "Something wrong somewhere. . . ."

BY THE ROADSIDE

A MAN came walking down the sandy, grass-bordered road.

He walked mechanically, like a machine set to go, and going without consciousness or effort—without a question or a thought, without a glance to either side—on and on.

He reached the top of a rise from which the road sloped down to the valley. And here he stopped, as if set to go no farther.

Before him spread the landscape of the valley; green woods encircled it on every hand, like a protecting fence about a pleasure-garden. Within the area enclosed were mounds and hilly fields, stretches of meadow, farmsteads, rows of cornsheaves and haystacks, patches of stubble, a tiny stream with a bridge and a fall, and mills on either bank.

A thrill of emotion seized the wanderer at sight of it all; one glance let loose a flood of memories and thoughts of things long since forgotten.

All seemed as before. He looked at the stream, and followed the line of its course with his eye. The mills stared at one another from bank to bank, as they had always done since the beginning of time. But the mills themselves had changed. The old wooden structures were gone, and in place of them stood modern stone-walled buildings.

A lightning thought came into his mind: was there *anything* that was unchanged, though the setting seemed as it had been? What might not have happened in the little place during those years?

The wanderer felt uneasy at the thought. Here he was—but, who could say what he would find here, now he had come?

Slowly, with heavy steps, he took his way down towards the village. And ever as he neared it, his uneasiness increased.

. . . . . .

He came to a turn in the way. From just beyond came the tinkle of a bell, and, as he rounded the bend, he saw a flock of sheep grazing, and a fair-haired lad watching the flock.

The sight gladdened his heart—the sheep and the shepherd lad at least were as he had hoped to find them.

"Good-day!" he said heartily. "And whose lad are you, little man?"

"Just Stina's boy," answered the young herdsman easily, from his seat by the wayside.

"Ho, are you? . . . yes." The wanderer stepped across the ditch, sat down by the wayside, and lit his pipe.

"And what's the news in the place? I've been here before, d'ye see, and used to know it well. But 'tis long since I heard anything from these parts."

"News? . . . H'm." The lad felt a pleasant sense of importance at being thus asked, and stepped down from his seat. "Well, you've heard, maybe, 'twas Mattila's Tytto won the first prize at the cattle show?"

"You don't say so? Mattila's Tytto?" echoed the stranger, with a laugh. "And what else?"

"Why, there's no more that I know of—let me see . . ." The wise little eyes grew thoughtful. "Oh, I forgot. Yes, Maya, she's married, and they're building a bit of a place over by the clearing there. Shoemaker, he was, and a good match, they say."

"I see. That'll be the place. Looks as good as could be."

" 'Tis a fine place. Going to have a real stove, with a baking oven and all. . . . Then there's been another wedding besides, at Niemi—Annikki's it was. Only just married—though there's been plenty that asked her these years past, and rich men some of them too."

"Yes . . ." The wanderer felt as if something had struck him in the breast. Impatiently he went on:

"And how's things at Koskela?"

"Koskela—well, old man there he died last spring, and they say . . ."

"Died?" A heavier stroke this; it seemed to paralyse him.

"Yes—and two horses to the funeral, with white covers and all. And silver stars all over the coffin—like the sky it was."

The wanderer felt himself gazing helplessly into a darkness where hosts of silver stars danced before his eyes.

"You knew him, maybe?" asked the lad, watching the man's face.

"Ay, I knew him," came the answer in a stifled voice.

"And his wife's like to follow him soon," went on the boy. "She's at the last gasp now, they say."

The wanderer felt as if something were tightening about his heart.

"So there's neither man nor wife, so to speak, at Koskela now."

The wanderer would have risen, but his limbs seemed numbed.

"There was a son, they say, was to have taken over the place, but he went away somewhere long ago, and never came back."

The wanderer rose to his feet. "Thanks, little man." And he strode off.

The lad stared wonderingly at the retreating figure, whose heavy steps sounded like sighs of pain from the breast of the trodden road.

THE CUPBOARD

"COME in," said the key invitingly.

But the weary man stood motionless, paralysed by the thought that had come to him as he reached the door.

"Come in—you've waited long enough in coming."

And the weary man grasped the key, but stood holding it helplessly, like a child without strength to turn it.

It rattled in the lock under his trembling fingers. The noise roused him; he opened the door and went in.

. . . . . .

It was like entering a church. A solemn, expectant silence hung over the place—it was just as it had been when, as a child, he had first been taken to church.

And now, as then, his glance sought first of all the farthest background of the place. What he saw was like and yet unlike what he had seen there. Then, it had been the figure of a young man, holding out his arms over a group of children; now, it was the figure of an old woman, worn with sickness—but with the same great gentleness in her face.

The woman's eyes lit up, as though she had seen a miracle; her glance grew keen, as if wishing to be sure, and softened again, in the certainty that the miracle had come.

The trembling head was lifted, the frail body rose up like a bent bow, her mouth opened, and her lips began to move, but no sound came—she could but reach out one thin, trembling hand to the figure by the door.

He moved, and walked over to the bed. And the old woman and the weary man took each other's hands and pressed them, looked into each other's eyes and trembled with emotion, unable to speak a word.

Tears rose to the old woman's eyes, a gleam as of sunset over autumn woods lit her wrinkled face; the thin lips quivered between smiling and weeping.

"So you came after all," she said at last in a trembling voice. "I knew you would come—some time. And good that you came just now . . ."

She sank back wearily on the pillow, and the man sat down on a chair at her side, still holding her hands in his.

. . . . . .

The old woman lay with her face turned towards her son, looking at him with love in her eyes.

Then her look turned to one of questioning—there was something she had been waiting years to ask.

"Tell me, my son . . ." Her voice was almost a whisper.

But he could not answer.

"Olof, look at me," she begged.

And the man beside the bed lifted his eyes, great dark eyes full of weariness and stark fear—but bowed his head again and looked away.

The smile vanished from the old woman's face. She gazed long and searchingly at her son's haggard chin, his sunken cheeks and loose eyelids, the pale forehead, the furrowed temples—everything.

"Perhaps it has to be," she murmured, as if speaking to someone else. "'*And wasted all his substance . . . And he said, I will arise and . . .*'"

Her voice trembled, and Olof, in a hasty glance, saw how her wrinkled mouth quivered with emotion.

And suddenly the coldness that had almost paralysed him up to now seemed to melt away. He fell on his knees beside the bed, his face in the coverlet, and knelt there sobbing.

It was as in church, at the moment when each single heart withdraws from all the rest to offer up its own silent prayer.

. . . . . .

The old woman lay resting in her bed; her face wore the same look of sorrowful gentleness that it had done for years, despite the ravages of sickness.

But to-day, signs of uneasiness were apparent; shadows of fear seemed flitting ever and anon over her features.

Olof wiped his mother's forehead gently. "You are not so well to-day?" he asked.

" 'Tis not that—no. I called you, there was something I wanted to say. But I'm not sure—perhaps it would be better not. . . ."

He took her withered hand tenderly in his.

"Why do you think that, mother? You have never said anything but what was good."

" 'Twas meant to be so—ay, that's true. But there's times when it's hard to say what's best to do, and it's so with me now. For years I've been thinking to tell you before I closed my eyes the last time. And it's been a comfort to me in many trials. But now I come to say it . . ."

The sick woman's breast heaved, and drops of sweat stood out on her forehead.

"Best not to think too much if it worries you," said Olof, wiping her brow once more. " 'Twill be all right in time."

" 'Tis right enough—I know that really. 'Twould be a

wrong to myself and you, and to all I've hoped and believed, if I didn't speak—yet it's hard to begin. Come closer, you too, Heikki—I can't speak so loud. . . ."

The elder brother, who had just come in from the fields with his muddy boots on, had sat down close to the door. He moved his chair now nearer the bed.

The sick woman lay for a while in thought, as if weighing the matter in her mind. Then she looked long and earnestly at her two sons.

"You two will have to divide what's left," she said at last. "And I've not said a word of it before; you're not like to quarrel over it, I know. But there's one thing in the place that I want to keep separate from the rest, and give it up to you now, before I go."

She sighed, and was silent for a while, as if needing rest before she could continue. The two young men watched her expectantly.

" 'Tis nothing of great value, but it's all tied up like with something that happened once, and all the thoughts of it—and 'tis valuable to me. I mean the cupboard there."

The sons glanced at the thing where it stood; an old cupboard in two sections, that they knew well.

"You look surprised. Oh, if I could only tell you. . . ."

She gazed upwards in silence, as if praying for strength. Then, with a strange light in her eyes, she turned towards them and went on almost in a whisper, as one who tells a tale of ghosts:

"It was long ago. In this very room, on this very bed here lay a woman who had borne a man-child but four days before. She had always been tender and faithful and obedient to her husband, and had tried to do his will in

everything. And she had been happy, very happy. But before the child was born a suspicion had begun to grow up secretly in her mind. And now, on the fifth night, as she lay there with the newborn child, in the pale light from a lamp on the shelf of the cupboard there, the fear at her heart grew all of a sudden so strong that she got up, and went into the next room, to see if what she dreaded was true. . . ."

The sick woman turned her face to the wall to hide the tears that forced themselves into her eyes.

"But the one she sought was not there, and driven by fear, she crossed the courtyard, barefooted, and half-clad as she was, in the cold, over to the still-room. They used to make spirits at home in those days. She opened the door softly and looked in. There the fire was burning, and by the flickering light she saw a woman—a young woman then —lying on a bed, and beside her the man she herself had risen from her childbed to seek. And at the sight of them her heart died in her. She would have cried aloud, but only a groan came from her lips, and she went back, dreading at every step lest her legs should fail her. . . ."

The sick woman gasped for breath, and lay trembling; the listeners sat as if turned to stone.

"How she got back," went on the old woman, "she did not know herself; only there she was, sitting on the bed beside her child, pressing her hands to her breast, that felt as if it would burst. Then she heard footsteps outside, and a moment later the door opened, and with a roar like a wild beast, a man strode in—furious, with bloodshot eyes. He uttered a dreadful curse, and swung up an axe above his head. The woman almost fainted with fright. Then

behind him she saw her sister reaching up with a cry of horror towards the axe he held. It flew from his hand, the steel shone in the lamplight—and what happened after she did not know. . . ."

It was as if the axe had fallen at that moment, striking them all three. The mother closed her eyes. Olof was trembling from head to foot; his brother crouched in his seat, his features stiff with horror.

"When she came to herself," went on the sick woman in a trembling voice, "her husband was sitting beside her, with his head in his hands, his face ashy pale, his eyes blood-shot, and his body trembling all over as if shivering with cold. The axe had flown straight over the place where mother and child had been, missing them by an inch, and stuck fast in the cupboard beyond—it was standing there as it stands now. . . ."

The woman sighed as if in relief to find the danger past.

Olof grasped her hand eagerly, pressed it, and looked imploringly into her eyes.

"Yes, yes," she nodded, "he begged forgiveness—and she forgave him. And they were friends again. And that night he fetched up some putty from the cellar and filled the hole the axe had made, and painted it over afterwards. But—you can see where it was. . . ."

Olof rose to his feet and walked over mechanically to the cupboard; his elder brother sat still on his chair, looking over at the place in silent horror.

"You can see—it struck just between the two sides, and cut deep into the edges. It's plain to be seen, for all it's painted over now. As for the woman. . . ."

She broke off suddenly, her face pale and bloodless, her features quivering with painful emotion.

"The woman—she forgave him, and never a harsh word between them after. Folk said they lived so happily together. . . . But the hurt—the hurt was there. A woman's heart's not a thing to be healed with any putty and paint. . . ."

. . . . . .

She was silent, but her face was eloquent with feeling still.

Olof went back to his place, took her hand and kissed it again and again, with tears, as if praying for forgiveness. For the first time he realised the inner meaning of his mother's nature as he knew it—the undertone of sadness in her gentle ways. And he could not free himself from a strange, inexplicable feeling of guilt in himself, though till that day he had known nothing of her secret.

"And for the man . . . well, well, let him rest in peace! 'Twas not from any thought to soil his memory—but you're grown men now, my sons, and when you've wives of your own . . . Ay, a good man he was in many ways, a clever worker. And I know he suffered himself for—for the other thing. He'll be judged, as we shall all be judged—we've all of us enough to answer for. . . ."

For a long time the sick woman lay as if overwhelmed by stress of feeling, unable to speak. Olof, with tears in his eyes, sat deep in thought; the elder son had not moved.

"And now I can leave it to you," she went on more calmly. "'Tis all tied up, as I said, with thoughts of that time, ay, and hopes and prayers, all the best and the hardest in my life. And I'm not the only one that's had such things to bear through life. There's many a one the world knows

nothing of, for a woman can bear a great sorrow and never speak of it. And I've heard since, that there was trouble of the same sort here in the house before my day. . . . Heaven grant I may be the last to suffer! And so I wanted you to take the thing between you—half to each—the scar's between them, so you'll share that too. Remember it, and tell your children some time. And they can pass on the legacy to theirs—with all the hopes and prayers and tears it brought—only let the name be forgotten!"

All three looked earnestly at the grim heirloom that stood there reaching from floor to ceiling; it seemed to grow, as they watched, into a monument over the grave of many generations.

. . . . . .

The sick woman turned anxiously to her sons.

"Will you take it?" she asked. "Will you take it, with all that it means . . .?"

Olof pressed her hand to his lips in answer. The elder brother sat motionless, as before, his eyelids trembled as if he were on the point of tears. His mother read his answer in his eyes.

"I'm glad it's over now," she said in relief. "And now I've no more to give you, but—my blessing!"

Her face lit with the same great gentleness that had softened it for years, she looked long and tenderly at her sons.

"Olof," she said at last, as if to wake him from his thoughts; *"it happened at the time before you were born. . . ."*

The elder son looked at his mother in astonishment—why should she tell them what they had known all along?

But Olof looked up suddenly, as if he had heard some-

thing new and significant. The quiver in his mother's voice told him what she meant, the look in her eyes seemed to shed a light on what had been dark before.

Questioningly he looked at her, as if silently asking confirmation of his thought.

She nodded almost imperceptibly.

"I have often thought of that, these last sad years. . . ."

Olof felt as if a mighty storm had suddenly torn away a dark, overshadowing growth, laying bare the heart of a fearsome place—deep clefts and stagnant pools and treacherous bogs.

"Ay, there's much that's hard to understand," she whispered in his ear. "But go to your work, now, sons. I'm tired now, leave me to rest. . . ."

The young men rose and left the room. In the doorway they turned and cast a last glance at their mother, but she seemed no longer to heed them. She lay with her hands folded on her breast, gazing calmly at the old cupboard where it stood by the wall, like a monument above the grave of many generations.

THE HOUSE BUILDING

THE funeral was over.

The two brothers sat by the window, in thoughtful mood, and speaking little.

". . . And you'll take over the place now, of course," said Olof to his elder brother, "and work the farm as it's always been done since it's been in the family. 'Twon't be long, I doubt, before you bring home a wife to be mistress here. . . . Anyhow, I take it you'll go on as before?"

"What's in your mind now?" asked Heikki, with a little sharp cough.

"Only what I've said—that you'll take over Koskela now," said Olof cheerfully.

"H'm. You know well enough 'twas always meant that you were to take over the place—I'm not the sort to be master myself. Look after the men at their work—yes. But run the place by myself . . ."

"You'll soon get into the way of it," said Olof encouragingly. "And as to the men—I've an idea a farm's the better for a master that works with his men as you've always done, instead of going about talking big and doing nothing."

The elder brother cleared his throat again, and sat staring before him, drumming with his fingers on the edge of the chair.

"And what about you?" he asked, after a while.

"Oh, I'll look after myself all right. Build a bit of a house, and maybe turn up a patch of ground or so."

"Build a house . . .?" repeated the other in surprise.

"Yes. You see, brother, each goes his own way," went on Olof heavily. "And I've a sort of feeling now that I can't live on anything out of the past. I must try and build up a life for myself, all anew. If I can do that, perhaps I may be able to go on living."

The elder brother stared with wide eyes, as if listening to words in a strange tongue. Then he began drumming with his fingers again.

"H'm. I don't know quite what you mean, but it's no business of mine, anyway." He spoke with a touch of respect in his voice, as if to a superior. "We'll have to do as you say. But do you think Koskela will be the same with none but me to look to it all?"

"Surely it will!" said Olof warmly.

"Why, then, have it as you please. But if things begin to go wrong here, then you'll have to take over yourself."

"I will if need be. But by the time you've ploughed this autumn you'll see yourself there will be no need. Good luck go with you, brother, and with the place."

"H'm." The elder brother coughed again. "And what about the price. We must fix that beforehand."

"What for? You take over the place as it stands, and you'll find it good enough. Give me the bit of marshland at Isosuo, and the oat fields adjoining, and the little copse that's fenced in with it, and that's all I want. You can let me take what timber I want from your part, for building and such."

"Ho, so you think that's fair, do you?" said his brother eagerly. "A nice bit of ground—and there's all the clay you'll need ready to hand. But it'll cost a deal of hard

work to drain and clear it—I've thought over that many a time. As for the building timber—you shall have all you want, and help for the carting. But all the same we must fix a price for Koskela as a whole, and make a fair division."

"There's nothing to divide, I tell you. You take over the whole place, except the bit I've said. You see how it is: each of us wants to give more than the other's willing to take, so there's no need to quarrel about that. And if I want anything later on, I'll ask you for it; if there's anything you want, you'll come to your brother first."

"Well, well—I dare say it'll be all right. Anyhow, I'll do what I can to keep up Koskela as it's always been."

And the elder brother began once more drumming with his fingers, faster this time, and as it were more firmly.

Suddenly he sprang up. "They ought to finish that field to-day—I must see they don't stop work before it's done."

He left the room and hurried across the courtyard.

Olof rose and followed his brother to the door, watching him as he strode along, with head bowed forward a little and arms swinging briskly at his sides.

"Each works best in his own way," he said to himself, smiling affectionately at the thought. "And maybe his way's like to be better for Koskela than they ever thought."

. . . . . .

Olof turned off from the main road down a little forest track; he carried an axe on his shoulder.

An autumn morning, solemn and still. The night had been cold, the morning air was so fresh and light it almost lifted one from the ground—it seemed almost superfluous to tread at all.

A strange feeling had come upon Olof as he started out.

Between the hedge-stakes on either side of the road hung bridges of the spider's work—netted and plaited and woven with marvellous art, and here and there a perfect web, the spider's masterpiece, hung like a wheel of tiny threads. Then as the sun came up, thread and cable caught its rays, till the road seemed lined with long festoons of silver, and decked at intervals with silver shields.

In the forest, too, it was the same—the path lined with silver hangings on either side, and webs of silver here and there along the way.

"Spiders bring luck, so they say," thought Olof. "Well, at any rate, they're showing me the road this morning."

And he strode on briskly, eager to begin.

"To-day's the test," he thought. "All depends on how I manage now. If it goes well, then I can do what I will. But if I've lost my strength and will these years between, then—why, I don't know where to turn."

Eagerly, impatiently, he hurried on, trembling with expectation, and sweating at the brow.

"Maybe I'm taking it too seriously," he thought again. "But, no—it is life or death to me, this. And I don't know yet what I can do—it may go either way. . . ."

He swung the axe in a wide circle from the shoulder, held it out at arm's length, then straight above his head, and swung it to either side. It weighed as lightly as a leaf, and he felt a childish delight—as if he had already passed the first test.

. . . . . .

He reached the place at last—a hillside covered with tall, straight-stemmed fir and pine. He flung down coat and hat, never heeding where, glanced up along the stem he had

chosen, then the axe was lifted, and the steel sank deep into the red wood—it was his first stroke in his native forest after six years' absence.

The forest answered with a ringing echo from three sides, so loud and strong that Olof checked his second stroke in mid-air, and turned in wonder to see who was there.

And the trees faced him with lifted head and untroubled brow, without nod or smile, but with the greeting of stern men bidding welcome.

"Hei!" Olof answered with a stroke of the axe.

And so they talked together, in question and answer and dispute. . . .

"What am I working out here all alone for?" said Olof. "Why, 'tis this way . . ." And with the red-brown fir chips flying all around him, he told them the story.

"So that's it? Well, good luck to you," answered the trees, and fell, one after another, till the earth rang and the echoes answered far through the forest.

Olof felt himself aglow with an inward fire that flamed the more as he gave it way in ringing strokes of the axe. He counted it a point of honour to strip each branch off clean at a single blow, be it never so thick. . . . And the more he worked the happier he grew.

He was trying to win back the years in which he had never held an axe.

. . . . . .

By noon he stood in the middle of a clearing already.

"Well, how does it feel?" asked the trees, as he sat down, with his jacket slung over his shoulders, hastily eating the meal he had brought with him.

"None so bad—hope for the best," he answered.

Again the axe flashed, the branches shivered, and the earth rang. "Bit crooked, that one," said Olof to himself; "but I can use it all the same—do for a piece between the windows."

"Well, you know best," said the trees. "But how many windows are you going to have—and how many rooms? You haven't told us that yet."

"Two rooms, no more—but two big ones." And Olof told them all his plans for doors and windows and stoves, and an attic above the entrance—he had thought it all out beforehand.

"Yes, yes. . . . But where are you going to build?"

"On the little hill beside Isosuo marsh—that's where I thought."

"Isosuo marsh?" cried the trees, looking in wonder first at one another and then at Olof himself. Then they smiled triumphantly.

"Bravo!" they cried in chorus. "Bravo, and good luck go with your building, and prosperity roof over all! 'Tis good to see there's some that still dare begin life for themselves in the forest."

" 'Tis that I'm hoping to do—that and no more."

"But what do folk say to it? Don't they think you're mad?"

"They call me nothing as yet, for I've not told any of what I'm doing."

"Just as well, perhaps," said the trees.

And they fell to talking of Isosuo, of drains and ditching, the nature of the soil, and all that Olof would have to do.

And the axe sang, and the chips flew, and the woods gave echo, and the talk went on. And the day came so quickly to

an end that Olof started to find how it was already growing dark. "Well, and what do you say now?" asked the trees expectantly.

Olof stepped from stem to stem, counting the fallen. There were forty in all—and he laughed.

"I shall be here again to-morrow, anyhow," he said gaily.

"If you come to-morrow, then you will come again till it's done," said the trees. "Come, and be welcome!"

. . . . . .

Olof walked home whistling cheerfully; he felt as if the house were already built up round him. It was a great thing, enough to take up all his thoughts, and strong enough in itself to strengthen him anew.

"HIRVIYOKI, KYLANPAA, 28/9/97.

KYLLIKKI,—You will be surprised, no doubt, to hear from me again after so many years. I am not sure of your address, and do not even know if you are still 'Kyllikki,' or possibly someone with another name that I do not know. I am too proud to ask news of you from any but yourself.

"And now to what I have to say. I have never been able to free myself from you quite, however much I wished. I have tried to forget you, to wipe away all trace of you from my soul, but in spite of everything you have followed me from place to place, year after year, and now, just lately, you have been ever before my eyes. Was it your friendship that followed me so, or my own guilty conscience —or perhaps my better self that has been longing for you, and silently calling for you, though I tried to stifle the voice?

"I do not know. I only know that my years of wandering are over now, and I have come to settle down in my own place. I may freely confess that I was weary and broken down, worn out and hopeless, when I came home—to see my mother for the last time, and follow her to the grave. And I cannot say, even now, that I am much better, though perhaps a little. I can feel something in me that seems to grow, something that gives me hope. So perhaps it is not altogether lost.

"I am building myself a house, and have other plans of a like sort. But there is one thing I miss, and the lack of it grows stronger every day: a friend and comrade, one that I could respect and trust entirely. Not one to share my good fortune, but one to be with me in toil and want.

"Kyllikki, you can never guess how I have suffered in doubt and questioning of late. Have I any right at all to hope for comradeship? Could I promise anything to anyone? And if so—to whom? . . . Kyllikki, you know me well enough to understand what I mean. It is no light question, and no easy one to answer.

"As far as I myself am concerned, I believe I see my way clear. And therefore I ask you—will you venture out upon the water with me once more—not the mere crossing of a little stream, but for a voyage that may lead we know not where? I cannot be sure that we should ever reach safely to land, only that if your hand is still free to give, and you are willing, and can trust me enough to offer it, then I will never let go, whatever may come.

"And one thing more—could a daughter of Moisio venture to share the lot of a poor settler? I can offer nothing more, and would not if I could. If she will, then I can dare anything.

"Again—would you *wish* to join your life with mine? Or do you despise me, perhaps? I will not try to defend myself, and it would be useless in any case, for I know that little matters would not influence your decision; all must rest on what you think of me as a whole, and that is fixed already.

"One thing most of all—let there be no question of pity or giving out of charity. I fancy neither of us would ever give or take in that way, but I have heard say that pity

counts for much in a woman's heart. Myself, I do not think pity can go far, if the earlier feeling is once dead. And you know best yourself whether that is so.

"Is your father still alive? And does he still think as before? But it makes no difference now. Once *we* are agreed, ten fathers could make no difference. I feel now that I can do what I will.

"And that is all for now, Kyllikki. You know how anxiously I wait to hear from you—your answer means very much to me. But I know it will be clear and true, whichever way it may be. OLOF.

"My address is, Olof Koskela, as above."

. . . . . .

"KOHISEVA, 2 *Oct.* 1897.

"OLOF,—Your letter found me. Kyllikki is unchanged—and you, I see, are much as I had thought you would be. Proud and exacting as ever, though not perhaps in quite the same way. And well it is so, for if *you* had seemed otherwise I should have suspected at once.

"Yes, I will venture. I am ready to venture anything. I did not even need to think it over; I had decided long since, and have not changed. I am not ashamed to tell you that I knew more of you than you thought. I have followed your doings and your movements from a distance, until you came home, and determined to wait for you till it was past hoping for. I feel I ought to tell you this at once, that you may know I am not building up fair hopes on no foundation, but know what I am doing, and what I can expect.

"You need not fear pity from me, Olof. I believe in fate, and in life as a thing with some meaning. I have often wondered, these last few years, if there could be any mean-

ing in my life, and why fate had brought us so strangely together. Was it only to make us suffer? I came at last to the conclusion that if there were any meaning in my life, it must be with you; and if fate had any plan at all, it must be that you should come back to me some day, even though the way were hard. And you came, came with the very word I had been waiting to hear from your lips for years—that *you had need of me!* All is easy after that; no need to doubt or hesitate. I can answer at once: I am ready.

"I do not think, or hope, that our way will be strewn with roses. But it is right, I feel that; and in time we shall reach our goal.

"Come, Olof, come soon. Four years I have waited—four years of longing, all my life's longing.—Your

"WATER-WITCH.

"P. S.—Father is the same, but what you say about that is what I say myself.

"One thing I would ask you—let me see you alone first, before you meet my father. I could not bear to meet again after all these years in that way. Come to our old meeting-place beforehand, if you can, and let me know what day and time you will be there.

"KYLLIKKI."

MOISIO

OLOF walked up the steps to the homestead at Moisio.

A trifle pale, perhaps, but confident, ready to meet whatever might chance, and determined to gain his end.

He opened the door and went in. There were two in the room: an old man with bushy brows—who, unaware of the visitor's approach, was on the point of going out himself—and a girl. She was waiting anxiously, and as the door opened, her heart beat as if it would leap from her breast.

All three stood for a moment in silence.

"Good-day to you," said Olof respectfully to the old man.

No one answered. Olof marked how the dark brows drew together like two murky storm-clouds.

"Good-day," came the answer at last, sharp and hard—as if the speaker were unwilling to deny a certain courtesy, even to the most unwelcome guest, in his own house.

Having said so much, however, he felt no further obligation, and went on sternly:

"I told you last time that I did not wish to see you again. What brings you here now?"

The words fell like strokes of an axe; the girl turned pale, and leaned against the wall.

"This," said Olof calmly. "When I spoke to you last time, matters did not pass off as they should. I beg your

forgiveness for that. And now I have come to ask again for your daughter's hand."

"You—a wastrel . . .!" The old man's voice trembled with anger.

"I have been. But let us talk calmly, if you please."

"Lumberman!" The word was flung out with a bitterness and contempt that cut like a knife.

A dark flush rose to Olof's cheek; he was hard put to it already to control himself.

"True," he said, slowly and with emphasis. "I have been a lumberman. There are clodhoppers enough to ditch and plough, but good lumbermen are none so easy to find."

The old man raised his eyebrows, then lowered them again with an expression as of a beast about to spring.

"Go!" he thundered.

A deep silence followed. Olof bit his lip, then drawing himself up defiantly, he poured out a flood of words.

"You—you drove me out from here once before, and I went at your bidding. Now, I move not a step till we have fought this out between us. I came to you to-day with all respect—yes, and asked your pardon for last time, though even now I do not know which of us two was more in the wrong. And I am going now, but not at your bidding—and not alone. I have come to ask for what is mine by right—and I would do the same if she were a star in the skies of heaven!"

The old man was leaning forward with clenched fists; without a word he rushed towards the door.

Olof's mind was made up on the instant—he would take the man by the arms and set him down and bid him talk

over matters quietly and decently, as became his age. He stepped forward resolutely.

"Father!" The girl sprang forward hastily between them. "Father—I . . . it is true. I am his by right!"

The words came like a blow from behind—the father turned and looked long at the girl.

"You . . .!" he cried, astounded. "You say—you are his by right? Ho! And perhaps you've been waiting for him, then, all these years, when you said 'No' to one after another?"

"Yes," she answered calmly. "And I have made up my mind to be his wife."

The old man took a step towards her.

"Made up your mind, have you . . .?"

"Yes," said the girl gently; "and I want you, father, to consent."

"But suppose I've made up my mind?" The old man drew himself up and stood between them, straight as a fir stem. "And this I say: My daughter's not for any wandering lumberman that has the impudence to ask."

He spoke with firmness and authority—matters seemed hopelessly at a deadlock. There was a moment of tense silence. Kyllikki bowed her head, then slowly she looked up and faced her father, steadily, confidently—Olof noticed with surprise how the two in that moment were alike. Expression and attitude were the same in both.

"And if she chooses to give herself—what then?"

The old man's eyes flashed.

"Then—why, she can go as his mistress, if she please, but not as my daughter!"

Silence again. Kyllikki flushed angrily; Olof was hardly

able to restrain himself. But he realised that the two must be left to themselves for what concerned themselves—he could only make matters worse.

"Choose," said her father, coldly and with dignity. "And make haste about it—the fellow here is waiting. But mark this," he added with a sneer, as confident of victory: *"If* you go, you go at once. And you take with you nothing—not a rag nor stitch that was my daughter's. You go . . . *dressed as you came.* You understand!"

The two stood amazed at first, hardly comprehending. Then, as the meaning of his words dawned on them, in its fearful cruelty, they looked at him aghast.

"Father . . . is that your last word?" asked the girl earnestly.

"Yes!"

Pale and red by turns, she stood hardly seeming to breathe.

The old man's lips curved in a scornful smile. Olof stood waiting his sentence, unable to think or feel.

Then slowly the girl raised her head, seeming to tower over her surroundings. She raised her hands without a tremor, slipped the fastenings of her blouse, and almost before they could realise what she was doing, she stood bare-armed, bare-throated before them.

The smile faded from the old man's lips. Olof's heart beat with a wild delight—he felt an impulse to take the girl in his arms and carry her off.

Calmly she went on—unhooked her skirt and let it slip to the floor beside her blouse.

The old man's face was ashy pale. Olof turned his back in fury and disgust.

But the girl never flinched. Quietly she loosened the strings of her petticoat. . . .

"Enough!" The old man's voice was like a cry from the underworld.

Olof turned—the girl looked inquiringly at him.

"Go! Take her—be off with you both!" cried her father, beyond himself. "Ay, you're hard," he went on, to the girl, "hard and obstinate as the rest of our blood ever were, too hard for your woman's clothes! And as for you, I hope you can keep a wife now you've got her. Of all the cursed . . ."

The young pair flushed, but they stood still, unable to move.

"Get your things on," said the old man impatiently. "And you—sit down."

A sudden wave of shame came over the girl; snatching up her clothes, she fled into the next room.

The master of Moisio walked slowly to the window and sat down heavily, a beaten man. Olof felt a thrill of pity for the old man.

They sat for a few moments in silence; then Kyllikki entered once more, blushing still, glanced hastily at Olof, and sat down, watching her father's face.

At last the old man turned. The scene had left its mark on him, but there was dignity still in his glance as he looked Olof full in the face.

"You've made yourself my son-in-law," he said, "though 'twas no wish of mine it should be so. But we may as well start with a clear understanding. 'Tis our way here to say what's to be said at once, or give a blow where it's needed—and have done with it."

" 'Tis no bad way," said Olof, hardly knowing what he was saying. "My father's way was much the same."

There was a slight pause. "We've one or two things to talk over now," went on the old man. "I should like to hear, to begin with, what you're thinking of doing. Wandering about as before, maybe?"

"No. I've done with that. I've settled down in my own place—I'm building a house there," answered Olof.

"H'm. Building a house, are you? I could find you a house here, for that matter. I dare say you know I've no son to come after me. And I'm an old man now."

Olof looked wonderingly at him. "I understand now," he said slowly, "what you meant before. And I thank you for your kindness. But it's this way with me now—I can't live in another man's house; I must make a place for myself, and work for myself. I was to have had the farm at home, but I couldn't take it."

"A farm?" cried the old man, rising to his feet. "Where —where do you come from, then?"

"From Kylanpaa in Hirviyoki—I don't know if you've heard of the place."

"I have been there, years ago," said the old man in a kindlier tone, taking a step towards him. "And what's the name of your place there?" he asked.

"Koskela."

"Koskela? That's a big place."

"Why, 'tis big enough," said Olof.

"And why didn't you say that before—when you were here last?" said the old man sharply. " 'Twould have been better for both if you had."

Olof flushed slightly. "I never thought to take a wife

but in my own name," he answered—"for myself, and what I might be worth by myself."

"Yes, that's your way," said the old man, scanning him critically. "I see it now."

He glanced out of the window and seemed to catch sight of something. "Don't mind what's past," he said kindly. "There's the horses coming from the smith's. I must look to them a minute. I'll be back again . . ." And he strode out.

The two that remained felt as if the calm of a bright Sunday morning filled the room after a stormy night.

Blushingly the girl hurried across to her lover, who came towards her; she flung her arms round his neck, and whispered:

"Olof, I have never really known you until now!"

"And I," he answered, "have never known you till to-day."

THE BROKEN STRING

THE dark of an autumn evening was abroad. It marched along the roads, stole over the meadows, and sat brooding in the forest; the shimmering waterways marked its track.

But at Moisio all the homestead was ablaze with light; every window shed its bright stream into the night, as if from a single fire within.

And from within came a constant sound of many voices, as of men sitting round the hearth relating manifold adventures. Outside, all round the house, were voices too, loud and low, soft and harsh, with an undertone of whispering in corners, and footsteps moving here and there. All that there was of life and light and sound in Kohiseva seemed gathered this night at Moisio.

The fiddler played his hardest, the floor creaked, and the walls quivered to the tramp of many feet; a stream of figures passed continuously before the windows.

The wedding had taken place that afternoon. Then came feasting and dancing—and the guests were dancing still, though it was close on midnight.

The bridegroom was a fine upstanding fellow, and the bride a worthy mate—as stately a pair as any had seen. All the neighbourhood agreed in this—and all had seen the couple, though not all had been bidden to the feast. A whisper had been passed among the crowd without, fol-

lowed by a shout from all, demanding to see the bride and bridegroom. And when the pair came out and stood in the porch, with their following behind, the onlookers greeted them with shouts and cheers—just as at fine folk's weddings in the great cities, declared those who knew.

The bridegroom was happy—and well he might be, with such a bride. And the bride, too, was happy—as well she might be after waiting all those years. All knew the story—the first strange wooing, with the desperate venture down the rapids, and the lover's Song of the Blood-Red Flower as he went away. And more was whispered about—fragmentary tales of the bridegroom's adventurous life and the trials of the girl who waited for him to return; rumour had gathered what was known, and popular fancy had added thereto at will. The stories passed from mouth to mouth among those outside, and even among the guests within, reaching almost to the bridal pair themselves. There was a touch of something legendary, heroic, about it all, that shed a halo of romance even upon old Moisio's grey head.

. . . . . .

Again they call for bridegroom and bride—the hero and heroine of the story—manly courage and womanly faithfulness personified; a sight to look on again and again. Again the light streamed out into the porch, and again the shouts and cheers went up, and one or two of the more curious and venturesome slipped into the house unbidden in the press.

It was a bright and festive scene within. The roof-beams were draped with white, and the hangings glittered like newly-fallen snow in the morning sunlight. The walls, too, were draped, and decked with wreaths and garlands;

here and there a bunch of fresh juniper twigs seeming to speak of newly-arisen life.

. . . . . .

The dancing ceased for a moment; the guests adjourned to the well-furnished tables in an adjoining room—the women following the bride, the men by themselves, with the bridegroom and old Moisio himself. Trays clattered, glasses rang, a hum of gay voices filled the room, and all eyes shone with a festive gleam.

Then the fiddler tuned up once more, and the guests streamed out back into the hall. The men stayed a moment to finish their glasses, and followed after.

The bridegroom came last. Suddenly it occurred to him to fetch something for the fiddler, and he turned back. Having found what he wanted, he was leaving the room, when a stranger barred his way.

Olof started; the man had come suddenly and silently as a ghost. There was something uncanny about him as he stood there—a short, heavily-built fellow, standing without a word, one hand in his trousers pocket, a cigar in his mouth, and a red rosette, such as peasants wear on holidays, in the buttonhole of what was evidently his best coat. There he stood, gazing fixedly at Olof, with a curious glitter in his eyes.

"I've a word to say to the bridegroom, if so be he's time to hear," said the man in a hoarse voice, still keeping the cigar between his teeth.

"Why . . . here I am, if you want me," said Olof, "though I don't know who you are. . . ."

"No," said the man, "you don't know who I am. And

yet we're sort of related—yes, that's the word—for all we've never met before."

He took a step forward.

"'Tis your wedding night—and I've come to wish you joy of it. You've played with many a woman's heart in your time, and driven more than one good lad to despair—maybe 'twill do you good to learn . . ."

"What?" cried Olof, with sudden fury. "Out with it, man!"

The fellow's glassy eyes seemed to be straining forward, the pupils were glittering points of light.

"You, that have worked your will on any and all as it pleased you—robbed your betters of all they had and cared for—'twill do you good, maybe, to know that . . . *Do you think you're taking an innocent girl for your bride?*"

The man stood watching the effect of his words. He saw Olof's face darken, his nostrils expand and quiver. Saw him tremble from head to foot, like a tree about to fall, waiting but for the last stroke of the axe. Well, he should have it. . . .

"Well—how does it feel?" He bowed mockingly, and went on with a sneer: "Wish you joy . . . I've more reason, perhaps, than the others, seeing we're partners, so to speak, in the same . . ."

"Liar—devil—coward!" Olof's rage broke loose. A step forward, almost a spring, and with the strength of fury he seized the man by his coat with both hands and lifted him from the floor.

"Say your prayers!" hissed Olof between his teeth, still holding the man in mid-air, the shirt-front crushing under his grip. The man struggled helplessly once or twice, then

hung limp; the cigar fell from his mouth, and Olof felt the body a dead weight in his hands.

"I . . . I've been drinking," he gasped—"drinking . . . don't know what I've been saying. . . ." The words bubbled pitifully from the pale lips, like the last drops from an empty barrel.

"Well for you!" Olof set the man down and loosed his hold. "Or I'd . . . Huh! Get out of this—d'you hear?"

The man staggered, looking this way and that, then turned and stole from the room without a word.

. . . . . .

Olof stood alone. His brain was in a whirl, dazzling lights floated before his eyes.

"It must be true! No one would ever dare unless . . ." There was no doubt in his mind—it was only too natural that it should be so. The retribution he had feared so long—it had come at last, and ruined all in a moment.

The fiddler was playing louder than before; the whole house shook—they were dancing again. To Olof the music seemed like a mighty peal of scornful laughter, as if the host of people there were laughing and dancing for joy at his shame.

"Make an end—make an end!" he cried to himself, and he rushed from the room. How he was to end it he did not know—only that this was unendurable—it was hell!

. . . . . .

Smiling faces greeted Olof as he appeared in the doorway and stood a moment, unable to get through the press. His brain cleared a little—after all, he could not drive the guests from the house like a madman with a knife in his hand.

They stood aside to let him pass, and he slipped round by the wall to the farther end of the room, and went up to the fiddler.

"Will you sell it?" he whispered—"sell your fiddle? There's a man wants to buy it—he's asked me. Never mind about the price—say what you like."

"Why . . . I don't know. 'Tis an old friend," answered the man, playing more softly as he spoke.

"Will you sell it? At your own price. Yes or no?"

"H'm . . . well, say thirty marks?"

"Good! The man'll be here directly. And now, play a polka—and play like the devil himself, as if you were kissing your girl for the last time. The fastest you've ever played."

The fiddler nodded.

. . . . . .

Olof walked up to a young girl and bowed. The fiddler broke off, and struck up a polka at such a furious pace that the dancers stopped and looked at one another in surprise.

But Olof went off in wild career with his partner, and several other pairs followed. These, however, soon fell out, and all stood watching the bridegroom, who danced like a man bewitched. His eyes blazed, a strange smile played about his lips, and his head was lifted defiantly.

The onlookers were filled with admiration and wonder—never had they seen such a dance! Olof took a second partner, then a third; danced a couple of rounds with each, and took a new. He did not lead them to their places after, but slipped each lightly, bowed to another, and whirled her off at the same furious pace.

"What's come over him now?" whispered the guests.

"He's going to dance with them all—for the last time, it seems."

"Ay, it looks like it!" And they laughed and watched the extraordinary scene—after all, it would have been strange if something out of the common had not happened at Olof's wedding.

Once more Olof set his partner down and bowed to another. Formally this time, as if with emphasis: it was Kyllikki he had chosen now. The girl stood dismayed, uneasy, not knowing what to think.

The fiddler, noting who was the latest choice, pressed his instrument closer under his chin, and put his whole fire into the work. The music swelled and sank, the bridal pair danced lightly and gracefully—a sight to see. Once, twice, three times, four times round, and still they danced.

Then as they passed the fiddler for the fifth time, the music suddenly stopped—Olof had snatched the instrument with his right hand as he passed, and next moment it was shivered to a thousand fragments against the table. A single string whined painfully as it broke.

A gasp went up from the onlookers; all stared in amazement at the pair. Neither showed any sign of confusion; they stood easily, as if the whole thing were a prearranged conclusion.

"I hope I haven't startled anyone," said Olof gaily. "But the fiddle that has played my youth away—must play no more! Good-night!"

A sigh of relief and admiration passed through the crowd. What a finish! What a youth! None but he could ever have done the like.

And the guests laughed, and the bridegroom laughed, and

old Moisio himself laughed where he sat: "Ay, that's the way! Turn your back on the rest and give all to one—my daughter's worth a fiddle at least!"

But the bride was pale—as it might have been one Sunday evening by the river, when she sat alone on the bank, watching a man stride hastily away, with a flush of anger on his cheek.

THE BRIDAL CHAMBER

FOOTSTEPS approaching.

A man, with a dark fire smouldering in his eyes, entered in—the pale bride followed him.

The man walked up and down the room with heavy strides, biting his lip and frowning angrily. Suddenly he stopped, and stood by the table against the farther wall, with a cold, piercing glance at the pale-faced girl.

She had been standing silent and thoughtful by the window—now she approached him with hesitant step.

"Olof," she murmured, her voice quivering with tender anxiety—"Olof—dearest, what does it mean?"

"Dearest?" He snapped out the word between clenched teeth like the rattle of hail against a window-pane. His voice trembled with tears and laughter, cutting scorn and bitterness. He grasped her roughly by the shoulders.

"Keep away!" he cried, boiling with rage, and thrust her from him with such violence that she stumbled and sank down on a sofa.

There she sat in the same position, struck helpless by the suddenness of the blow. Then she rose and, flushing slightly, walked resolutely up to him again.

"Olof, what does all this mean?" she asked. There was tenderness still in her voice, but beneath it a steely ring plain to be heard.

Olof felt his blood boiling in his veins—that she, guilty

as she was, should dare to stand there with uplifted head, and look him calmly in the face! His eye fell on the myrtle wreath which she wore—emblem of bridal purity—and it seemed to mock him anew. He felt an almost irresistible impulse to fall on her and tear her in pieces.

"It means," he cried, stepping threateningly towards her, "that you have no right to wear that wreath—that you are an infamous cheat!"

And with a violent movement he tore the wreath and veil from her head, and trampled them underfoot, till the wires of the framework curled like serpents on the floor. "Liar—liar and hypocrite!" he cried.

Kyllikki did not move; she stood there still silent, only the red flush in her cheeks deepened.

Nothing was left of the wreath now but some strands of wire and a few loose leaves—Olof spurned it aside, and the veil after it. Then he drew himself up, and looked at Kyllikki with the eyes of a man who has crushed one foe and prepares to meet another.

"Will you be good enough to tell me what all this means?" said Kyllikki, calmly as ever, but with a new note in her voice that almost amazed herself.

"Tell you? Ay, by Heaven. If I had my pistol here, I'd answer you so that you should never ask again!"

Kyllikki shuddered—a chill sense of utter helplessness came over her. She was shamed and insulted, her bridal wreath trampled underfoot, and she herself here alone with a man who raved and threatened furiously. She looked at him earnestly, as if trying to read him through. And she felt that here was indeed something great and terrible, on which her future—their future—depended; a single word

or gesture on her part might be fatal. Suddenly a thought crossed her mind and the blood rushed to her head. . . . Could he dare? . . . Was his anger greater than his love?

Swiftly she decided—now or never, it must be done, or all would be lost. Stepping across to a chest, she opened the lowest drawer and felt for something there . . . no . . . and she tried the next. A moment after, she rose to her feet and walked firmly over to where Olof stood.

A large, old-fashioned revolver was in her hand; the dark barrel glinted in the light as she laid it on the table.

"There is the thing you wanted. It is loaded. Now, answer me, if you please."

She spoke slowly, putting forth all her strength to keep her voice from trembling. Then stepping back, she stood waiting, her face pale, her eyes fixed on Olof's face.

It was the critical moment. To Kyllikki it seemed endless, as she stood there stiffly, dreading with every breath lest she should fall.

Olof stood motionless, staring at her as at a vision. Once before he had seen her thus—during the ordeal with her father. A stifling fear came over him as he marked the similarity.

"What do you mean—are you trying to drive me mad?" he cried in a choking voice. And tearing his hair, he rushed violently towards the door.

Kyllikki felt the blood coursing warmly through her veins once more.

Olof strode furiously up and down, then came to a standstill before her. His rage flamed up again, and he set himself to play the part of a judge.

"Defy me, would you?" he shouted, pale with anger. "Do

you know what you are? A liar, a perjured hypocrite! Do you know what you have done? You have cheated me! You have ruined my wedding night, trampled on my happiness and my future—you have shamed me in the eyes of the world. You are no pure and innocent girl, but a . . ."

He stopped, breathless, and stood gasping for a moment, then went on brokenly: "But now it is out. Now you shall answer for it all. Do you know a fellow who was here tonight—a wretched little worm with a red rosette in his coat? You know who I mean well enough—deny it if you dare!"

"Yes, I know him well. What of it?"

"Ah, you know him—yes. . . ." He gave a hoarse, nervous laugh. "That ghastly little abortion came to me tonight and told me. . . ."

He stopped, on purpose to torture her the more.

"What did he tell you?" asked Kyllikki breathlessly.

"You know well enough . . . *that you had given him long ago what should have been mine to-night!*"

He stood enjoying the effect of his words: Kyllikki staggered as if struck—exactly as he had intended.

The girl was trembling in every limb. She felt a loathing for the man before her—and for all his sex. These men, that lied about women, or cried out about what was *theirs* on their wedding night, raved of *their* happiness, demanding purity and innocence of others, but not of themselves . . . she felt that there could be no peace, no reconciliation between them now, only bitterness and the ruin of all they had hoped for together.

"And what then?" she asked coldly, with lifted head.

"What then?" cried Olof wildly. "What . . ."

"Yes. Go on. That was only one. Are there no more who have told you the same thing?"

"More? My God—I could kill you now!"

"Do!" She faced him defiantly, and went on with icy calm: "And how many girls are there who can say the same of you?"

Olof started as if he had been stabbed. He put his hands to his head, and strode violently up and down, muttering wildly: "Kill you—yes, kill you and myself too, kill, kill, kill . . ."

So he went on for a while, then, flinging himself down on the sofa, he tore open his coat, snatched off the white rosette he wore, and threw it down, crying out in agony: "Why must I suffer like this? Was there ever such a wedding night? It is hell, hell . . .!"

Kyllikki stood calmly watching him. She was gradually feeling more sure of herself now. At last she moved towards him.

"Do you want me to love you?" she said quietly. "Or must I hate you and despise you? You listen to the stories of a drunken fool, instead of asking the one person in the world you should trust; you give me no explanation when I ask you. Is it any wonder, after all, that the man should have said what he did—to let you taste for once a drop of the poison you have poured out for who knows how many others? As for him, I knew him when we were children—there was some talk of our being married, years ago. He was five years older than I, and was too young then to know of any harm in an occasional caress. More than that never

—though it seems in his drunken wickedness he tried to make out there was."

"Kyllikki, is it true?" cried Olof, springing to his feet.

"It is true. *I* am still pure, but you—have you the right to ask a pure woman to be your wife?"

"Have I the right . . ." he began haughtily; but the words died on his lips, and he sank back on the sofa, covering his face with his hands, as if to keep out visions of dread.

"It would have been only just," Kyllikki went on, "if it had been as you believed—yes, it should have been so! And you knew it—and *so* you stormed and threatened to kill me!"

She paused for a moment; Olof quailed under her glance.

"Pure and innocent," she continued; "yes, that is what you ask, that is your right. But have you for one moment thought of me? I, *who am innocent and pure*—what is given to me in return?"

"You are torturing me," answered Olof, wringing his hands. "I know, I know—and I have thought of you too. . . . Oh, . . ."

"Thought of me?—yes, perhaps you have, now and again. There was something of it in your letter—you felt it then. And I took it as a prayer for forgiveness, and I could have faced it all as it was—I was thinking more of you than of myself. But now . . ."

"O God—this is madness!" cried Olof, his voice choking with sobs. "Is this the end? . . . And this night, this night that I have looked forward to in my brightest dreams —this new dawn that was to be . . . crushed, crushed, a

trampled wreath and veil . . . and this is my wedding night!"

He flung himself face downward on the sofa, sobbing violently.

"Your wedding night?" said Kyllikki softly. "*Your* wedding night? How many such have you not had before? But mine . . ." Her voice broke. "Oh, mine has never been, and never will be, never. . . ."

She burst into a violent fit of weeping, and sank trembling to a seat.

And the bridal chamber echoed with sounds of woe, with utterances of misery that might have called the very walls to pity.

. . . . . .

Olof wakened with a start; moving blindly, he had stumbled against her, and at the touch of her body he flung himself on his knees before her and hid his face in her lap.

"Kill me!" he moaned. "Forgive me and then kill me and make an end."

His passionate outburst seemed to calm her; she sat still, and her tears subsided.

"Speak to me!" cried Olof again. "If you cannot forgive me, then kill me, at least—or must I do it myself?"

But Kyllikki made no answer, only bent forward and, slipping her hands beneath his arms, drew him up, softly and slowly, and pressed him closer to her.

A sudden warmth filled him, and he threw his arms round her gratefully, as a child might do.

"Crush me, then, crush me to death, and I have all I asked for!"

But she did not speak, only held him closer. And so they

lay in each other's arms, like children, worn out with weeping.

"Olof," said Kyllikki at last, freeing herself, "when you wrote, you said you did not ask me to share joy and happiness, but to work and suffer with you."

"Ay, then," said Olof bitterly. "And even then I still hoped for happiness."

"But, don't you see . . . To-night, it is just that. Our first suffering together."

"It has ruined all!"

"Not all—only what we had hoped for to-night. All the rest is as it was."

"No, no, do not try to deceive yourself and me. And for myself—what do I care now? I have deserved it all—but you, you . . ."

"Say no more, Olof. Let this be ended now and never speak of it again. See, I have forgotten it already."

"All . . . you . . ."

"Yes, all—for your sake. Oh, let us be content! No one in all the world can ever have all they hoped and wished for. And if we cannot have our wedding night as lovers—let us at least be friends and comrades now."

"Comrades? . . . yes, in misery," sighed Olof. And they drew together in a close embrace; two suffering creatures, with no refuge but each other.

. . . . . .

"Olof," whispered Kyllikki after a while, "we must go to rest now—you are worn out."

Both glanced at the white bridal bed—and each turned in dismay to the other, reading each other's thought.

"Can't we—can't we sleep here on the sofa?—it's nearly morning," said Kyllikki timidly.

Olof grasped her hand and pressed it to his lips without a word.

Kyllikki went to fetch some coverings. As she did so, she caught sight of something lying on the table, and keeping her back turned to Olof, she picked up the thing and put it back in the drawer. Olof's eyes followed her with a grateful glance.

But as she touched the pillows and the white linen she had worked with such hopes and kisses and loving thoughts for this very night, she broke down, and stood with quivering shoulders, fumbling with the bedclothes to hide her emotion.

Olof felt his eyelids quivering, warm drops fell on his cheek. He rose and stepped softly to her side.

"Kyllikki," he whispered entreatingly, "have you forgiven me—everything?"

"Yes, everything," she answered, smiling through her tears, and threw her arms round his neck. "It was childish of me to cry."

Gratefully, and with a new delight, he pressed her to his heart. . . .

. . . . . .

"Olof, don't put out the light yet—let it burn till the morning."

Kyllikki lay stretched on the sofa. Olof nodded, and laid himself down with his head in her lap and his feet on a chair by the side.

And two pairs of darkly glistening eyes fell to whispering together, like lonely stars in a dark autumn sky, while the earth sighed through the gloom.

THE SOMNAMBULIST

OLOF was a sleep-walker, though he never dared to confess it even to himself. There was something mysterious and terrifying in the thought. A soul that cannot rest, but goes forth when others sleep, on errands of its own; the body follows, but without consciousness. The eyes are open, but they see only that which the soul is pleased to notice on its way. It will climb like a squirrel to the roof, walk along narrow ridges at a giddy height. It will open windows and lean out over black depths, or play with keen-edged weapons as if they were toys. And the onlooker, in his waking senses, shudders at the sight, realising that it is the soul stealing forth on its nightly wanderings.

So it had been with Olof for a long time now—almost from the time when Kyllikki first became his.

The scene of their bridal night was forgotten; neither ever hinted at what had passed. They had tried to fuse with each other in the deep and beautiful relationship which had its roots deep in the soul of both, and in the earnest striving that was to clear and cultivate the ground on which their future should be built.

Olof was proud of his wife; she moved with the beauty of a summer Sunday in their new home—calm and clear-eyed, ever surrounded by a scent of juniper or heather. And he was filled with gratitude, respect, and love for her—for her tender and faithful comradeship.

Then, like a bird of night on silent wings, came this walking in his sleep.

It had happened many times without his knowing it. And still he refused to believe it, though he had more than once been on the point of waking to full consciousness. And he was glad that Kyllikki seemed to suspect nothing—for she said no word. He dreaded most of all the hour when she should wake and speak to him reproachfully: "Are my arms not warm enough to hold you; can your soul not find rest in my soul's embrace?"

Of late the mere thought of this had made him restless. And to guard against it he had thrown himself with redoubled energy into his work, as if life depended on the ditching and draining of a marsh. And gradually there grew out of this a new and far greater project, in which the entire neighbourhood would share.

. . . . . .

It was in the quiet hour of dusk, when Olof had just come home from his work, and the walls of the room seemed whispering expectantly.

Silently as the dusk Kyllikki stole into his opened arms, her eyes asking what he had to tell, and pouring out her own thoughts and feelings.

Olof laughed, but did not try to meet the innermost depth of her eyes; after a little he ceased to look at her at all, but turned his gaze far off, as if looking out over the work of the day.

A little while passed thus.

Almost unconsciously Olof lifted one hand and loosened the plaits of his wife's hair, letting the long tresses fall freely over her shoulders. Smiling and looking into far distance,

he passed his hand through the soft waves, and wrapping the ends about his fingers clasped her waist.

"My own love," he whispered, gazing at her as through a veil, and bending to touch her lips.

And as they kissed Kyllikki felt his arm tremble. Tenderly she looked into his eyes, but started in wonder at their strange expression—they seemed wandering far off.

And the dark forebodings that had long oppressed her filled her now with a sudden dread. The more she looked at him, the more she felt this fear—at last it was almost more than she could bear.

It was as if the soul that looked out of his eyes had suddenly vanished, leaving only a body that stiffened in a posture of embrace.

She trembled from head to foot, her whole body seemed turned to ice. Suddenly she tore herself away, and sank down on a seat; Olof stood without moving, as if turned to stone.

In a single moment something terrible had passed between them, which neither dared to speak of, but which showed plainly in their eyes. A gulf seemed to have opened before their feet, filled with strange and horrible creatures, all waving tentacles and ghastly staring eyes.

Kyllikki covered her face with her hands as if to shut out the sight.

"Olof—your soul, your soul . . ." she moaned, like a little child.

Olof stood as hovering on the verge of sleep and waking. But at sight of her trembling figure he seemed to come to himself, and tried to break loose from the spell.

"Kyllikki . . .!" he said imploringly.

She sat up, sobbing, and gazed at him as at one whom she did not know.

"Kyllikki, poor child!" he said brokenly, and sat down by her side. But his own voice sounded strange in his ears, and he could say no more—he felt as if he were a ghost, not daring to speak to a living human creature.

At sight of his unspoken misery Kyllikki felt her own dread rise up stronger than ever.

"I knew the suffering would come," she said mournfully. "So many have had their place in your heart that I could not hope to fill it all myself at first. But I love you so, and I felt so strong, I thought I could win my way into it little by little until it was all mine . . . and now . . ." She broke off, and fell to sobbing anew.

Olof would have given anything to speak to her then, but found no words.

"And it is so terrible to see it all and be helpless," she went on. "You are a wanderer still—and I cannot hold you . . . you leave me—for those that wait for you. . . ."

"O Heaven!" cried Olof in agony. "Kyllikki, don't—don't speak like that. You know I do not care for any other—would not be with any other but you."

"But you go—even against your will. And they come towards you smiling. I am all alone—and they are so many. And they must win—for I can give no more than one woman can. But they are for ever whispering to you of what a woman can give but once in her life—each in her own way. . . ."

"Kyllikki!" Olof broke in imploringly.

But she went on unheeding, pouring out her words like a stream in flood-time.

"And they hate me because I thought to keep you for myself alone. And while you lie in my arms they come smiling and whispering and thread their arms between us and offer you their lips. . . ."

"Kyllikki!" he cried again, and grasped at her hand like a drowning man.

"And then—then it is no longer me you hold in your arms, but those others; not my lips, but theirs, you kiss. . . ." She tore her hand away, and broke out weeping anew.

Olof sat as if turned to stone. The thing was said—it was as if a secret curse was for ever dogging his footsteps, and spreading poison all around.

Kyllikki's despair gathered and grew like an avalanche. What a blind self-deceit their life had been! How they had hoped and dreamed—with a gulf of naked hopelessness on every side!

"If only I had—what I have hoped for these last two years, then I could bear it all. For that—none could rob me of that! But now—I know why it has not come. And now there is no hope even of that!"

And she groaned aloud.

Olof felt as if a dagger's thrust had pierced the tenderest nerve of an already aching wound. He had tried to comfort her, though he himself had long since lost all hope. The fault could only lie with him—and now he understood! He felt himself crushed by a weight of despair, and sat there staring before him, without a word.

Kyllikki grew calmer after a while, and looked up. The silence of the place came to her now for the first time, and with it a new dread. She turned to Olof, and at sight of his face, drawn with despair, and darkly shadowed in the

gloom, she realised what her words must have meant to him.

"Olof—dear!" she cried, taking his hand. "What have I done? I did not mean to reproach you. It might be my fault as well—it must be mine more than yours. . . ."

But Olof sat motionless as before, save for a shiver that now and then passed through his frame.

And Kyllikki, seeing him thus, felt her own trouble fade; a wave of unspeakable tenderness and affection came over her.

"Don't—Olof, you must not be miserable for that," she said earnestly. "Oh, how could I ever say it—how could I be so thoughtless and selfish and cruel . . .?"

"No," said Olof—"it was not that. You could not help it. You were my conscience, that is all—as you must ever be, or you would not be the friend you are."

"Don't say that, Olof—it was just that I forgot. We are friends—and the one thing that can make and keep us friends is to toil and suffer together—Olof, *together!*"

Gently she drew closer to him, and threw her arms about him.

"Don't you see?" she went on softly. "It's all because I love you so. I want you for myself, all for myself. I will not let you go—no, you shall look at me. I will drive them away, all of them, if they try to come between us; oh, I am strong enough, I know. You are mine, Olof, do you hear? All mine—mine. . . . Oh, why do you sit there so? Speak to me, Olof!"

Her passionate earnestness burned like bright flames about him, gradually warming his heart to life again.

"Kyllikki, how good you are!" he said, and his eyes glistened as he spoke. "You are all I have in life—without

you, I should be lost. If only—if only I could be sure of one thing. . . ."

"What is it—tell me, Olof . . .?"

"That—that you do not despise me, but trust me, that you believe I only care to be yours."

"Trust you?—indeed I do," said Kyllikki. "I know we are both striving toward the same end. But there are enemies that are always on the watch. We must beat them—and we will! And I am yours—all yours—as the night when you said good-bye to Kohiseva. And you are mine—all mine . . . and then, Olof—then it will come—the one thing I must have to live for. . . ."

OUT OF THE PAST

"KIRKKALA, 7 *May* 1899.

DEAREST,—You will not be angry because I write to you? How could you, you who are so good! I would not have written, but I must, for there is so much to tell you. It is spring now, as it was then, and it has brought with it such a longing that I must turn to you, speak to you—and then I can wait again till next spring. You must have known that I have been with you—surely you felt it? And now here I am, having learned by chance where you are.

"Do you remember the story I told you? About the girl and her lover and the mark on her breast? And what I asked for then, and you gave me? I have often wondered since whether, perhaps, you might have misunderstood it all —when I was so serious and thoughtful about it—if you thought I was not certain of myself, not sure that I should always be yours, as I wished to be. But it was not so, dear Olof; I knew myself well enough even then, though not so deeply as I do now. How strong and deep love is! I read once in a poem—surely you know it too:

> " 'The lightning stroke falls swifter than breath,
> But the tree that is struck bears the mark till its death.'

And so it is—there is no more to add; it is as if written by the finger of God. And so it must be, or what would our love be worth?

"But it is not all who understand it, even the half. Human beings are so strange—wondering and asking always—people ask, for instance, why I am always so lonely. . . . They cannot see that I am not lonely at all.

"Olof, if you knew all I have felt and suffered in these years! I hardly know if I dare tell you. But I must—I only turn to you now to say it all, so that I may feel easier after. I have longed for you so—more than I can ever say; I wonder how I have been able to live at all. Olof, Olof, do not look at me! I have only come to whisper a little in your ear. . . . I have had such dreadful thoughts. As if someone were always behind me whispering, 'Look, there is a knife—it is a friend; take it and press it deep in your breast—it will feel like the softest touch of the evening wind. Look, the river is in flood. . . .' And I have hardly dared to pass by the well, for it looked up at me so strangely with its dark eye. And I know I should have given way if you had not saved me. When I thought how you would feel if you heard what I had done, I seemed to see you so clearly; you looked at me reproachfully, only looked at me without a word, and I felt ashamed that I had ever thought of what would cause you sorrow. And you nodded, and forgave me, and all was well again.

"Then I took to hoping that some miracle should bring you back to me. I hoped something might happen to you, so that I could buy your life with mine. You might be bitten by a snake—it does happen sometimes. Coming up one night with the lumbermen, and then next morning the news would be all over the place, how you had been bitten, and were on the point of death; and I would hurry down with the rest to where you were, and bend down beside you, and

press my lips to the place and draw the poison out. And then I could feel it passing with your blood into my veins, in a great wave of happiness. And soon I should sink down beside you on the grass; but you would be saved, and you would know I had been true to you until death.

"So I waited year after year. Then I wanted you to be ill—very, very ill for a long time, and weak, till your heart could hardly beat at all for want of blood, and you lay in a trance. Then the doctors would say if anyone would give their blood he might come to life again. But no one could be found, for there were only strangers there. Then I hear about it, and come quickly, and the doctors start at once, for there is no time to be lost. And they draw off my blood and let it flow into your body, and it acts at once, and you move a little, though you are still in a trance. 'A little more,' say the doctors—'see, the girl is smiling; it will do her no harm.' And they only see that I smile, and do not know how weak I am already. And when you wake, I am cold and pale already, but happy as a bride, and you kiss me on the lips like a lover. For now I am your bride, and one with you for ever, and I cannot die, for my blood lives in you!

"But all this was only dreams. You were not ill, nor bitten by a snake, and at last I did not even know where you were. And then I wanted to die, for I felt so weak. And I waited for it day after day and month after month—I had already written to say good-bye to you. But death did not come—I had to go on living.

"I have been so ill, Olof—it is my heart. Perhaps I am too sensitive; they called me a dreamer when I was a child. And even now that I am older they have said the same. But how could I ever forget you, and the hours that were the

confession and communion of my whole life? How could I forget those evenings when I sat at your feet and looked into your eyes? Olof, I can feel it all still, and tremble at the thought of it.

"You must forgive me all this. It feels easier now that I have spoken to you and told you about it all—how I still feel grateful to you for all you gave me then. I was very childish and poor then, and had nothing to give you in return —now, afterwards, I could perhaps have given you something too. I should have been so happy if we could have been together always; earth would have been like heaven, and none but angels everywhere. And even now I can be so happy, though I only have you in secret. Secretly I say good-night to you, and kiss you, and no one knows that you rest every night in my arms. And, do you know, Olof, there is one thing that is so strange, I hardly know what it means. Now, just lately, I have felt sometimes that you were really here, your living self, sitting beside me and whispering that I was yours, your love, your friend. And it makes me so happy—but I always cry afterwards.

"There was one thing more—but I can't think what it was. Something about . . . yes, now I remember. The greatest and loveliest of all, that I asked you for. Shall I tell you? The miracle has happened, though no one knows about it. You gave it me after all, that spring when I was so ill. And I could not live without it. He is two years old now—oh, if you could only see him! His eyes and his voice—they are just your very own. Do not be anxious about him. I will be so careful, and see that he grows up a fine man. I have sewed every stitch of his clothes myself, and he looks like a prince—there never was such a child. We are al- -ys

together, and talking of you. I am sorry for mother sometimes; she looks so strangely at me, and says I go about talking to myself—but how could she know of my prince and his father, and why I talk? Talking to myself, she says. But I am talking to the child all the time.

"There, and what more was I going to say? I can't remember now. I feel so much better now I have told you all about it. And now the summer is coming—I always feel happier then. It was raining before, but now the sun has come out and the birds are singing. And so good-bye, my dearest, my sunshine, my summer.—Your own

CLEMATIS.

"Do not write to me—I am better as I am. I know you have not forgotten me, that you could not forget . . . and that is all I ask."

THE MARK

OLOF was growing uneasy—a feeling of insecurity had come over him. The air seemed full of mysterious forces, whispering together and joining in alliance against him.

It had all looked clear and simple enough before. No one had ever stood in his way or threatened his plans. But now something was threatening him—something unknown, mysterious, but which he could not help feeling all the time.

He made every effort to resist—to gather arms and allies against what was to come. His project for draining the marsh was the first thing; he went about from one homestead to another, talking to the men one by one, and trying to interest them in the idea. A general meeting was held, and he made a great speech, putting out all his powers of persuasion; his voice rang with a convincing strength, and his words carried weight. And to begin with, all went well enough; it was agreed that an expert should be called in to investigate the whole question, and work out the probable cost of the undertaking.

But then came a period of waiting and inactivity, which sapped his strength anew. He had to seek about for some fresh task, for new difficulties to meet and overcome, in order to regain his confidence in himself. And so for a week he roved about in the forest between his own and the neighbouring parishes.

At last he found what he sought—the line for a new road, better and quicker than the old one.

It was a fine idea, that no one could deny. It would be a great gain to all in Hirviyoki, especially for those in the outlying parts; it meant a saving of miles on their way to the railway, the mills, and other centres.

And so once more Olof went from house to house, seeking adherents among the most influential men, so as to crush opposition before the matter was taken up for general discussion. He started with those nearest at hand, working gradually farther out.

. . . . . .

"Is this Inkala?" asked Olof of a serving-girl, as he entered the courtyard; he did not know the place, nor who lived there.

"This is Inkala—yes," answered the girl.

"Is the master at home?"

"No; he went off to Muurila this morning."

"H'm. And when's he coming back?"

"Don't know at all. But maybe mistress'll know. If you'd go in by the front way, I'll tell her."

Olof walked up the front steps.

Hardly had he entered the room when a slender, fair-haired woman appeared from within.

"Good-day to . . ." Olof began; but the greeting died on his lips, and a shiver passed through his body.

The woman stopped still; her lips moved, but uttered no word.

Stiffly, uneasily, they looked at each other. A glimpse of the past, a sequence of changes, things new and things familiar—the vision of a moment, seen in a flash.

A warm flush spread over the woman's cheeks, and she stepped forward without hesitation to greet the newcomer.

"Welcome, Olof," she said, with frank kindness, though her voice trembled slightly. "And is it really you? Sit down."

But Olof stood still, unable to recover himself.

"I dare say you're surprised to—to find me here," went on the woman, trying to speak easily and naturally, though her features and the look in her eyes revealed a certain emotion. "I have been here for four years now." She stopped, and cast down her eyes in confusion.

"Really—four years, is it as long as that . . .?" Olof stammered out the words awkwardly, and could say no more.

"But you've heard no news of me, I suppose, and my being here. I knew a little about you, though—that you had come back and were living near. . . ."

"Yes, yes. . . . No, I had no idea. . . . I came prepared to find only strangers, and then . . . to meet you here . . . so far from . . ."

"Yes, it is a long way from my home." The woman grasped eagerly at something to talk of. "And it's all so different here, though it's not so far, after all, counting the miles. It was very strange and new at first, of course, but now I like it well enough. And we often go over to the old place, and father and mother come to see us here. . . ."

"Yes, yes. . . . And how are they at home? Your mother and father?" Olof asked, with a ring of pleasant recollection in his voice.

"Finely, thank you. Father was bad for a time last winter, but he's got over it now, or nearly . . ."

She broke off and glanced at the door. It was thrust open a little, and a child's head looked in.

She stepped hastily across the room. "What do you want in here? Can't you see here are visitors—and you with your dirty overall on?"

"I wanted to see," said the little man stubbornly, with childish insistence, and clung to his mother.

Olof looked at the child as at a vision.

The woman stood, pale and confused, holding the boy by the hand.

"Come along, then, and say good-day," she stammered at last, hardly knowing what she did.

The boy came forward, and stood holding Olof's knees, looking up into his face.

Child and man gazed at each other without a word or movement, as if each were seeking for some explanation.

"I haven't seen you before," said the child at last. "Do you live a long way away?"

Olof felt himself trembling. The child's first words had set his heart beating wildly.

"But you mustn't stay here, dear," said the woman hastily, and led the boy away. "Go into the next room a little—mother's coming soon."

The child obeyed without a word, but in the doorway he turned, and again looked wonderingly at his mother and the strange man. . . .

. . . . . .

Olof was gone; the young mistress of Inkala sat alone in her room.

Thinking it over now, it seemed like a dream. Was it

indeed Olof she had seen? Or had she been dreaming in broad daylight?

It had seemed natural enough at first. Both were surprised, of course, at the unexpected meeting, but soon they had found themselves talking calmly enough.

But the entry of the child had brought a touch of something strange and unspeakable—it seemed to change them all at once to another footing, bringing up a reckoning out of the past.

True, she had wondered now and again if fate would ever bring her face to face with Olof again—if he would ever see the child. But she had put the thought aside as painful to dwell upon.

And now, here they were, those two; no stranger but would at once have taken them for father and son, though in truth there was no kinship between them.

It was as if she were suddenly called upon to answer for her life.

First it was her son that questioned her, standing in the doorway, looking at both with his innocent eyes.

And then—a triple reckoning—to Olof, to her husband, and to God.

Until that day her secret had been known to none but God and herself. And now—he knew it, he, the one she had resolved should never know.

And the third stood there too, like one insistent question, waiting to know. . . .

"Daisy . . .?"

She would have told him, frankly and openly, as she herself understood it. How she had longed for him and the thought of him, and never dreamed that she could ever

love another! Until at last he came—her husband. How good and honest and generous he had been—willing to take her, a poor cottage girl, and make her mistress of the place. And how she herself had felt so weak, so bitterly in need of friendship and support, until at last she thought she really loved him.

No, she could not tell him that—it would have been wrong every way—as if she had a different explanation for each.

And to Olof she said only: "I loved him, it is true. But our first child—you saw yourself. It's past understanding. It must have been that I could not even then forget—that first winter. I can find no other way . . ."

Olof sat helplessly, as in face of an inexplicable riddle.

Then she went on, speaking now to God, while Olof was pondering still.

"You know . . . you know it all! I thought I had freed myself from him, but it was not so. My heart was given to him, and love had marked it with his picture, so that life had no other form for me. And then, when I loved again, and our first-born lay beneath my heart . . . All that was in my thoughts that time . . . and after, when the child was to be born . . . the struggle in my mind . . . how I did not always wish myself it should be otherwise—dearly as I have paid for it since. . . ."

And at last, in a whisper, she spoke to her husband:

"It was terrible—terrible. For your sake, because you had been so good—you, the only one I love. It was as if I were faithless to you, and yet I know my heart was true. I would have borne the secret alone, that is why I have

never spoken of it to you before. But now I must—and it hurts me that any should have known it before."

Olof was waiting—she could see it in his eyes.

"You know, I need not tell you how it has made me suffer," she said, turning towards him. "And when the second time came, and I was again to be a mother, I wept and prayed in secret—and my prayer was heard. It was a girl—and her father's very image. And after that I felt safe, and calm again. . . ."

She marked how Olof sighed, how the icy look seemed to melt from his eyes.

And she herself felt an unspeakable tenderness, a longing to open her heart to him. Of all she had thought of in those years of loneliness—life and fate and love. . . . Had he too, perhaps, thought of such things? And what had he come to in the end? She herself felt now that when two human beings have once been brought together by fate, once opened their hearts fully to each other, it is hard indeed for either to break the tie—hardest of all for the woman. And *first* love is so strong—because one has dreamed of it and waited for it so long, till like a burning glass it draws together all the rays of one's being, and burns its traces ineffaceably upon the soul. . . .

But his tongue was tied, as if they had been altogether strangers during those past years; as if they had nothing, after all, to say to each other but this one thing. And it was of this he was thinking now—with thoughts heavy as sighs.

"Life is so—and what is done cannot be undone—there is no escape. . . ."

Those were Olof's words—all that he found to say to her in return.

"Escape? No! All that has once happened sets its mark on us, and follows us like a shadow; it will overtake us some day wherever we may go—I have learned that at least, and learned it in a way that is not easy to forget."

"You—have you too . . .?" Again she felt that inexpressible tenderness, the impulse to draw nearer to him. How much they would have to say to each other—the thoughts and lessons of all those years! She knew it well enough for her own part, and from his voice, too, she knew it was the same. And yet it could not be. They seemed so very near each other, but for all that wide apart; near in the things of the past, but sundered inevitably in the present. Their hearts must be closed to each other—it showed in their eyes, and nothing could alter that.

. . . What happened after she hardly knew. Had they talked, or only thought together? She remembered only how he had risen at last and grasped her hand.

"Forgive me," he said, with a strange tremor in his voice, as if the word held infinitely much in itself.

And she could only stammer confusedly in return: "Forgive . . .!"

She hardly knew what it was they had asked each other to forgive, only that it was something that had to come, and was good to say, ending and healing something out of the past, freeing them at last each from the other. . . .

One thing she remembered, just as he was going. She had felt she must say it then—a sincere and earnest thought that had often been in her mind.

"Olof—I have heard about your wife. And I am so glad she is—as she is. It was just such a wife you needed . . . it was not everyone could have filled her place. . . ."

Had she said it aloud? She fancied so—or was it perhaps only her eyes that had spoken? It might be so. One thing was certain—he had understood it, every word—she had read so much in his eyes.

And then he had gone away—hurriedly, as one who has stayed too long.

THE PILGRIMAGE

VISITORS coming!

Oho—indeed!

The cat is sitting on the threshold, licking her paws.

But Olof sits deep in thought, whittling at the handle of a spade. A stillness as in church—no sound but the rasp of the knife blade on the wood, and the slow ticking of a clock.

Olof works away. The wood he cuts is clean and white, his shirt is clean and white—Kyllikki had washed it. Kyllikki has gone out.

The cat is making careful toilet, as for a great occasion.

Visitors coming!

Already steps are heard outside.

The door creaks, the cat springs into the middle of the room in a fright; Olof looks up from his work.

Enters a young woman, elegantly dressed, her hair town-fashion up on her head, under a coquettish summer hat—a scornful smile plays about the corners of her mouth.

She stands hesitating a moment, as if uncertain what to say.

"Good-day," she says at last, with assumed familiarity, and taking a hasty step forward, offers her hand.

Olof scans her in silence from head to foot—surely he should know her?—and yet, who can she be . . .? He *will* not recognise her.

"Aha! You look surprised! Don't know me—don't you? Your own darling!" She laughs harshly, contemptuously.

"Or perhaps you have seen so many others since—rowans and berries and flowers—that you can't remember one from another?"

Olof's hand trembles, and his face turns white as the sleeves of his shirt.

The woman laughs again boldly, and flings herself on the sofa in a careless pose.

"Well, here we are again—staring at each other—what? Didn't use to stare that way, did we? What do you say?"

Olof has fallen into a seat; he looks at her, but makes no answer.

"And your princess—is she at home, may I ask?"

"No!" Olof answers with an angry ring in his voice.

The woman marks it, and draws herself up, as if in answer to a challenge.

"Good! I've no business with her. But I've something to say to you. And maybe it's best for her she's away. She'd not be over pleased to see me, I fancy." The words shot like venom from her tongue—a sting from laughing lips.

Her callousness seems to freeze him—while his blood boils at the insult to Kyllikki. He is about to speak: "Say what you will, but not an evil word of her!"—when the woman goes on:

"Well, it's no good sitting here solemn as an owl! I just thought I'd look you up—it's a long time since we met, isn't it? Let's have a little talk together—talk of love, for instance. I've learned a deal about that myself since the old days."

Olof was all ice now—the bold, scornful look in her eyes, and her short, bitter laugh froze every kindlier feeling in him.

Then suddenly the scornful smile vanishes from her face.

"Curse you all!" she cries wildly. "Oh, I know what men are now!" She stamps her foot violently. "Beasts—beasts, every one of you—only that some wear horns and others not, and it makes but little difference after all. . . .

"Ay, you may stare! You're one of them yourself—though maybe just so much above the ruck of them that I'm willing to waste words on you. Listen to me!" She springs to her feet and moves towards him. "I hate you and despise you every one. Oh, I could tear the eyes out of every man on this earth—and yours first of all!"

A wild hatred flames in her big brown eyes, her face is contorted with passion; she is more like a fury than a human being.

"And as for your love . . ." she went on, flinging herself down on the sofa once more. "Ay, you can twitter about it all so prettily, can't you?—till you've tempted us so near that the beast in you can grab us with its claws! Love—who is it you love? Shall I tell you? 'Tis *yourselves!* You beasts! We're just pretty dolls, and sweet little pets to be played with, aren't we? Until you fall on us with your wolfish lust . . . 'tis all you think or care for—just that!"

She spoke with such intensity of feeling that Olof never thought of saying a word in defence—he felt as if he were being lashed and beaten—violently, yet no worse than he deserved.

"Well, why don't you say something? Aren't you going to stand up for your sex? Why don't you turn me out, eh? Fool—like the rest of you! What is it you offer us, tell me that? Your bodies! And what else? Your bodies again—ugh! And sweet words enough as long as you want us; but as soon as you've had your fill—you turn over on the other side and only want to sleep in peace. . . ."

She gave him one long scornful glance, and sat silent for a moment, as if waiting for him to speak.

"Well—what are you sitting there writhing about for like a sick cat? What's the matter now? Oh, you're married, aren't you?—living in the state of holy matrimony . . . take a wife and cleave to her . . . one flesh, and all the rest of it . . . flesh! Ugh! Holy matrimony indeed! As if that could hide the filth and misery of it all! No! Beasts glaring over the fence at what you want—and when it pleases you to break it down, why not? And your wives—shall I tell you what they are to you—what they know they are? The same as we others, no more . . . your . . ."

A dark flush rose to Olof's cheeks, and he broke in violently:

"You . . . you . . ."

"Oh, yes, I'm coarse and vulgar and all the rest of it, yes, I know. But what about you men? You're worse than all! Marriage—it's all very well for the children. And even that . . . Wasn't it the men that wanted the State to take over all children, what? A pretty thought—leave your young behind you where you please—and the State to look after them. Make love free and beautiful. Oh, yes. And we're to have all the pain and trouble—and the State to pay—noble and generous, aren't you? What other beast gave you

that grand idea, I wonder? The dogs that run in the streets . . .?"

Olof sat motionless, watching her passionate outburst as if fascinated. And beneath the ghastly mask he seemed to see the face of a young, innocent girl, with childish, trusting eyes, and . . .

"No, it's no good your trying that," the woman broke in. "I know what you're thinking of now. You hate me, loathe me, as I am now. And you're asking yourself if it really can be the same little bit of a child that used to sit on your knee and look up to you as if you were God Himself! No—I'm not—there's nothing left but bitterness. Can't you understand? Oh, we're coarse and sour and harsh and all the rest—all that you've made us. But I'll tell you what we are besides—ourselves, *ourselves,* for all that!"

She rose up from the sofa, and crossing the room, sat down on a chair close to where Olof was seated. Then, lowering her voice a little, she went on, as if striving with words and look to penetrate his soul:

"We are women—do you know what that means? And we long for love—all of us, good or bad—or, no, there is neither good nor bad among us, we are alike. We long for you, and for love. But how? Ah, you should know! Answer me, as you would to God Himself: *of all the women you have known, has any one of them ever craved your body?* Answer, and speak the truth!"

"No—no . . . it is true!" stammered Olof confusedly.

"Good that you can be honest at least. And that is just what makes the gulf between us. For you, the body is all and everything, but not for us. We *can* feel the same desire,

perhaps—after you have taught us. But the thing we long for in our innermost heart—you never give us. You give us moments of intoxication, no more. And we are foolish enough to trust you. We are cheated of our due, but we hope on; we come to you and beg and pray for it, until at last we realise that you *can* give us nothing but what in itself, by itself, only fills us with loathing. . . ."

Olof breathed hard, as in a moment's respite at the stake, with the lash still threatening above his head.

"Yes, that is your way. You take us—but why will you never take us wholly? You give us money, or fine clothes, a wedding ring even—but never yourselves, never the thing we longed for in you from the first. You look on love as a pastime only; for us it is life itself. But you never understand, only wash your hands of it all, and go your own ways self-satisfied as ever."

Olof was ashy pale and his eyelids quivered nervously.

The woman's face had lost its scornful look, the hardness of her features had relaxed. She was silent a moment, and when she spoke again, seemed altogether changed. She spoke softly and gently, with a tremor in her voice.

"Even you, Olof, even you do not understand. I know what you are thinking now. You ask, what right have I to reproach you, seeing that I was never yours as—as the others were? It is true, but for all that you were more closely bound to me, with a deeper tie, than with the others. What do I care for them? They do not matter—it is nothing to me if they ever existed or not. But you and I—we were united, though perhaps you cannot understand. . . . Olof! When I sat close to you, in your arms, I felt that my blood belonged to you, and that feeling I have never altogether lost.

It is you I have been seeking through all these years—you, and something to still the longing you set to grow in my soul. Men fondled me with coarse hands, and had their will of me—and I thought of *your* caresses; it was with you, with you I sinned!"

The sweat stood out in beads on Olof's brow—the torture was almost more than he could bear. "I know, I know!" he would have said. "Say no more—I know it all!" But he could not frame a single word.

She moved nearer, watching him closely.

And slipping to the floor beside him she clasped his knees.

"Olof—don't look like that!" she cried. "Don't you see, it is not you alone I mean. Tear out your eyes—no, no, I didn't mean it, Olof! Oh, I am mad—we are all mad, we have sinned. . . . Do not hate me, do not send me away. I am worthless now, I know, but it was you I loved, Olof, you and no other."

Olof writhed in horror, as if all his past had come upon him suddenly like a monster, a serpent that was crushing him in its toils.

"No, let me stay a little yet, do not send me away. Only a moment, Olof, and I will go. No, I will not reproach you —you did not know me then. And I knew nothing—how should we have known?"

She was silent for a moment, watching his face. Then she went on:

"Tell me one thing—those others—have any of them come to you—since? Ah, I can see it in your eyes. None who have known you could ever forget. If only you had been like all the rest—we do not long for them when they are gone. But you were—you. And a woman must ever come

back to the man that won her *heart*. We may think we hate him, but it is not true. And when life has had its way with us, and left us crushed and soiled—then we come back to him, as—how shall I say it?—as to holy church—no, as pilgrims, penitents, to a shrine . . . come back to look for a moment on all that was pure and good . . . to weep over all that died so soon . . ."

Her voice broke. She thrust aside the piece of wood he had been holding all the time, and sent it clattering to the floor; then grasping his hands, she pressed them to her eyes, and hid her head in his lap.

Olof felt the room darkening round him. He sat leaning forward, with his chin on his breast; heavy tears dropped from his eyes like the dripping of thawed snow from the eaves in spring.

For a long while they sat thus. At last the woman raised her head, and looked with tear-stained eyes into his.

"Olof, do not be harsh with me. I had to come—I had to ease my heart of all that has weighed it down these years past. I have suffered so. And when I see you now I understand you must have your own sorrows to bear. Forgive me all the cruel things I said. I had to say it all, that too, or I could not have told you anything; I wanted to cry the moment I saw you. Your wife—did I say anything? Oh, I do not hate her, you must not think I hate her. I can't remember what I said. But I am happier now, easier now that I have seen you."

Her glance strayed from his face, and wandered vaguely into distance, as if she had been sitting alone in the twilight, dreaming.

"Olof," she said after a while, turning to him with a new light in her eyes, "do you know, a pilgrimage brings healing. It is always so in books—the pilgrims are filled with hope, and go back with rejoicing to their home. . . . Home . . .!" She started, as if wakening at the word.

"Should I go home, I wonder? What do you say, Olof? Father and mother—they would be waiting for me. I know they would gladly take me back again, in spite of all. Do you know, Olof, I have not been home for two years now. I have been . . . Oh, no, I cannot bear to think . . . Yes, I will go home. Only let me sit here just a little while, and look into your eyes—as we used to do. I will be stronger after that."

And she sat looking at him. But Olof stared blankly before him, as at some train of shadowy visions passing before his eyes.

"You have changed, Olof, since I saw you last," murmured the woman at his feet. "Have you suffered? . . ."

Olof did not answer. He pressed his lips together, and great tears gathered anew in his eyes.

"Oh, life is cruel!" she broke out suddenly, and hid her face in his lap once more.

For a moment she lay thus; deep, heavy silence seemed to fill the room. At last she looked up.

"I am going now," she said. "But, Olof, are we . . .?"

She looked at him, hoping he would understand.

He took both her hands in his. "Are you going—home?" he asked earnestly.

"Yes, yes. But tell me—are we . . .?"

"Yes, yes." He uttered the words in a sigh, as if to himself. Then, pressing her hand, he rose to his feet.

Staggering like a drunken man he followed her to the door, and stood looking out after her as she went. Then the night mist seemed to rise all about him, swallowing up everything in its clammy gloom.

THE RECKONING

HE sits deep in thought. Not a sound in the room. Then a knocking. . . .

The man starts, rises to his feet, and stares about him with wide eyes, as if unable to recognise his surroundings. He glances towards the door, and a shudder of fear comes over him—are they coming to torture him again?

Furiously he rushes to the door and flings it wide. "Come in, then!" he cries. "Come in—as many as you please! Rags or finery, sane or mad, in—in! I've hung my head long enough! Bid them begone—and they come again—well, come in and have done. Bring out your reckoning, every one. Here's what's left of me—come and take your share!"

But he calls to the empty air. And his courage fails as he looks into the blank before him—as a warrior seeking vainly for enemies in ambush. Slowly he closes the door, and goes back again.

A knocking. . . .

"Ghosts, eh? Invisible things? Come in, then—I'm ready."

And he faces about once more.

Again the knocking—and now he perceives a little bird seated outside on the window-sill, peeping into the room.

"You, is it? Away—off to the woods with you! This is no place for innocent things. Or what did you think to find?

Greedy, evil eyes, and groans, and hearts dripping blood. To the woods, and stay there, out of reach of all this misery!"

But the bird lifts its head, and looks into his eyes.

"Do you hear? Away, go away!"

He taps at the window-pane himself. The bird flies off.

. . . . . .

Once more cold fear comes over him; his pulses halt in dread.

"Not yet—not yet—no! One by one, to tear me slowly to pieces. Shadows of vengeance, retribution, following everywhere; burning eyes glaring at me from behind, fear that makes me tremble at every sound, and start in dread at every stranger's face. And if I forget for a moment, and think myself free, one of them comes again . . . ghosts, ghosts . . ."

He sat down heavily.

"Why do they follow me still? Is it not enough that I have lived like a hunted beast so long? Because I loved you once? And what did we swear to each other then—have you forgotten? Never to think of each other but with thankfulness for what each had given! We were rich, and poured out gold with open hands—why do you come as beggars now? And talk of poverty—as if I were not poorer than any of you all! Or do you come to mourn, to weep with me over all that we have lost?

"But still you come and ask, and ask, as if I were your debtor, and would not pay. Mad thought! I was your poet, and made you songs of love. Life was a poem, and love red flowers between. What use to tell me now that the poem was a promise, the red flowers figures on a score that I must pay? Go, and leave me in peace! I cannot pay!

You know—you know I have pawned all I had long since—all, to the last wrack!"

His own thought filled him with new horror; drops of sweat stood out on his forehead.

"And you, that have suffered most of all—what had I left for you? You, a princess among the rest, the only one that never looked up to me humbly, but stepped bravely to meet me as an equal. Yours was the hardest lot of all—for I gave you the dregs of my life, rags that a beggar would despise. . . ."

Suddenly he felt an inward shock; his heart seemed to check for a moment, then went on beating violently; the blood rushed to his head. Again the check, followed by the same racing heart-beat as before. . . .

Instinctively he grasped his wrist to feel his pulse. A few quick beats, a pause, then on again—what is it?

The fear of death was on him now, and he sprang up as if thinking of flight. Gradually the fit passes off; he stands waiting, but it does not return, only a strange feeling of helplessness remains—helplessness and physical fear. He sits down again.

"Was that you, Life, that struck so heavy a blow? Have you come for your reckoning, too? Like an innkeeper, noting this and that upon the score, and calling for payment at last? I should know you by now—I have seen a glimpse of your face before. . . .

" 'Tis a heavy book you bring. Well, what shall we take first? That? Yes, of course—it was always the heaviest item with us. My father . . . what was it mother told of him? And his father before him. . . .

"Look back, you say? Back along the tracks I made long

ago? Good—I look; you go about your business in the proper way, I see. If you had come with sermons, and talked of sin and heaven and hell, I'd leave you to preach alone—none of that for me. I know . . . that love is in our flesh and blood, drawing us like a magnet—in our day, none draws back a single step of his way for the fear of sin and hell—there is always time to repent and be forgiven later on! But your book shows our acts on this side, and what comes of them on that—and we stand with bowed heads, seeing how all is written in our own blood."

He stared before him, as if at something tangible and real.

"Yes, there's the book, and there is my account. All these strokes and lines—what's that? Something I can't make out. Here's my road, there are my doings—that I understand. And here are all that I've had dealings with. But this mess of broken lines . . . this way and that . . .? Ah, consequences! Is that it? Well, well. . . . All these run together at one point—that's clear enough—myself, of course. But these others running out all ways, endlessly. . . . What's that you say? More consequences, but to others!

"No, no! Not all that! Something of the sort I was prepared for—but all that? Is it always so in your book—is everything set down?"

"All that leaves any trace behind—all acts that make for any consequence!"

"All? But man is a free agent—this does not look like freedom."

"Free to act, yes, but every act knits the fine threads of consequence—that can decide the fate of a life!"

"No—no! Close the book—I have seen enough! Who cares to think of a book with lines and threads of consequence,

when fate is kind, and all seems easy going? I laughed at those who wasted their youth in prayer and fasting. And I laughed at the laws of life, for I could take Love, and enjoy it without fear of any tie—I was proud to feel myself free, to know that none had any claim on me—no child could call me father. But now, after many years, come those who speak of ties I never dreamed of. Here was a mother showing me a child—I had never touched her that way, yet you come and tell me there are laws I know nothing of. And when I beg and pray of you to grant me a child for myself and for her to whom it is life and death, you turn your back, and cry scornfully: 'Laugh, and take Love, and enjoy—you have had your will!' "

Again the terrifying sense of physical distress—of something amiss with heart and pulse. He sat waiting for a new shock, wondering if, perhaps, it would be the last . . . the end. . . .

The door opened.

"Olof! Here I am at last—am I very late? . . . Why, what is the matter? . . . Olof . . .!"

Kyllikki hurried over to him. With an effort he pulled himself together, and answered calmly, with a smile:

"Don't get so excited—you frightened me! It's nothing . . . nothing. . . . I felt a little giddy for the moment, that was all. I've had it before—it's nothing to worry about. Pass off in a minute. . . ."

She looked at him searchingly. "Olof . . .?"

"Honestly, it is nothing."

"It must be something to make you look like that. Olof, what is it? I have noticed it before—though you always tried to pass it off. . . ."

"Well, and if it is," he answered impatiently, "it need not worry you."

"Olof, can you say that of anything between us two?"

He was silent for a moment. "Why not," he said at last, "if it is something that could only add needlessly to the other's burden?"

"Then more than ever," answered Kyllikki warmly.

She hurried into the next room and returned with a coverlet.

"You are tired out, Olof—lie down and rest." With tender firmness she forced him to lie down, and spread it over him.

"And now tell me all about it—it's no good trying to put it off with me. You know what I am." She sat down beside him and stroked his forehead tenderly.

Olof was silent for a moment. Then he decided. He would tell her all.

"Yes—I know you," he said softly, taking her hand in his.

. . . . . .

It was growing dark when they sat up. Both were pale and shaken with emotion, but they looked at each other with a new light in their eyes, two human souls drawn closer together by hardship and sorrow.

"Stay where you are and rest a little, while I get the supper," said Kyllikki, as Olof would have risen. "And to-morrow—we can begin the new day," she added.

And, stooping down, she kissed him lightly on the brow.

WAITING

"The Empty House, 6/9/1900.

YOUR letter has just come—Kyllikki, you cannot think how I have been longing for it. I would have sent the girl to the station, only I knew you would not write till it was post day here.

"And you are well—that is the main thing; the only thing I care about these days. 'Strong enough to move mountains'—I can't say the same about myself. I have been having a miserable time. I am sorry I let you go—or, rather, that I sent you. I thought I should feel less anxious about you if you were there, but far from it. Why couldn't we have let it take place here? I am only now beginning to understand how completely we have grown together—I feel altogether helpless without you. If only it would come—and have it over, and you could be home again—you and the boy!

"And then I have something to tell you that I would rather not touch on at all, but we must have no secrets from each other now, not even a thought! It is the old uneasiness—it has been coming over me ever since you went away—as if I could not find rest when you are not near. I cannot get away from a feeling that all is not over yet—that things are only waiting for a favourable moment to break loose again. Try to understand me. You know how I suffered those two years when we prayed in vain for that which is granted to

the poorest. And you know how I was almost beyond myself with joy when at last our prayers were heard. But now, when it is only a matter of days before it comes in reality—now, I am all overcome with dread. It will go off all right, the thing itself, I know—you are strong and healthy enough. But there is an avenging God, an invisible hand, that writes its *mene tekel* at the very hour when joy is at its height. Think, if the one we are waiting for—it is horrible to think of!—if it should be wrong somehow, in body or soul—what could I do then? Nothing, only bow my head and acknowledge that the arm of fate had reached me at last. You cannot think what a dreadful time I had all alone here last evening. I cried and prayed that vengeance might not fall on you and him—the innocent—but on me alone—if all I have suffered up to now is not enough. And then a woodpecker came and sat outside under the window, with its eerie tapping. And a little after came a magpie croaking on the roof, like a chuckling fiend. It made me shudder all over. I dare say you will laugh at my weakness. But it might be one of those mysterious threads of fate. I have seen the like before—and you know how ill and nervous I was . . . at the time. . . . Now I have read your letter I feel calmer, but I know I shall not get over it altogether till I have seen him with my own eyes. Forgive me for writing about this, but I had to tell you. And I know it will not hurt you.

"But then I have been happy as well. I have been getting everything ready in your room—yours and his! You will see it all when you come, but I must tell you a little about it now. I have put down cork matting all over the floor, to keep out the draught. But when I had done it I had a sort of guilty feeling. Only a bit of matting—nothing much,

after all—but it came into my mind that many children have to run about on bare floors where the cold can nip their feet through the cracks. And I felt almost as if I ought to pull it all up again. But, after all, it was for *him*—and what could be too good for him! I would lay it double in his room!

"I have some good news for you. The Perakorpi road is already begun. And then some bad news—the drainage business looks like being given up altogether—just when everything was ready, and we were going to start. Just quarrelling and jealousy among the people round—real peasant obstinacy, and of course with Tapola Antti at the head. A miserable lot! I should like to knock some of them down. I have fought as hard as I could for it, thundering like Moses at Sinai, and sacrificing the golden calf. The thing must go through at any cost. If they will not back me up then I will start the work alone. And there are not many of them, anyway—we are to have a meeting again tomorrow.

"And then, when you come home, I can set to work in earnest. If only *he* may turn out as I hope—then perhaps one day we might work on it together. I wish I had wings—then I should not need to sit sweating over this wretched paper!

"Keep well and strong, and may all good angels watch over you both!—Your impatient . . .

"Write soon—at once!"

"8 *September* 1900.

"DEAR,—Your letter was like a beating of your own heart. Yourself in every word—and it showed me a side of your nature that I care for more than I can tell.

"You are anxious—but there is nothing to be anxious about. How could there ever be anything wrong with *our* child—in body or soul? Of course we must expect more troubles yet—but that has nothing to do with the child! I know you were in low spirits then, but body and soul were sound enough. And I feel so well and strong and happy now myself that it *must* be passed on to him—even if he were a stone! And then I am all overflowing with love for you and confidence in the future. And I shall feed him with it too, and then he will be the same. All that about the magpie and the woodpecker—you read it wrongly, that is all. The magpie simply came to give you my love—poor thing, she can't help having an ugly voice! And then the woodpecker—don't you see, it was just pecking out the worms from the timber—there must be no worm-eaten timber in *his* home! That's what it meant.

"But I am glad you wrote about it all the same. For it showed me that he will be as we hope. Now I understand how terribly you must have suffered these last years. You'd never make a criminal, Olof; even I, a woman, could commit a crime with colder courage. Oh, but I love you for it! And you don't know how glad I am to think my child's father is like that. A wakeful, tender conscience—that is the best thing you can give him, though you give him so much.

"I know it will be a boy—and I can feel in my blood that he will be just the son to work with his father as you said.

"And then about his room—you take my breath away! I can see you are making preparations as if for a queen and an heir to the throne. I ought to tell you to undo it all again;

but who could ever tell anyone to undo what was done in love—for it was for love you did it, not for show.

"So you are already fighting for your draining project; it is just as well, it will be worth the more. Anyhow, I know you will win. Fight as hard as you like, fight for me and for him. It is only a pity he can't set to work at once and help you.

"We too are longing to be home again. And perhaps it will not be so long now. But if it has to be, I can be patient as long as I must. We are better than ever now. Do you know, I am so happy these days I have taken to singing, just as I used to do when I was a girl. What do you say to that? Suppose he were to have a voice, and sing in the choir, and leave you to work at your drainage all by yourself!

"My love, my love, I kiss you right in your heart. The warmest love from us both—I know you will be writing to us soon.

"KYLLIKKI (waiting to be a mother)."

"HIS BIRTHPLACE, 10*th Sept.*, 11 *a. m.*

"FATHER!—Yes, that is what you are now. I can see your eyes light up. And a son, of course. At six o'clock this morning. All well, both going on finely; *he* is simply a picture of health, big and strong and full of life. And such a voice! If you want a man to shout out orders to the workmen . . . I haven't looked at him properly yet. He is lying here just beside me; I can see his hand sticking out between the clothes. A fine little hand, not just fat and soft and flabby, but big and strong—his father's hand. The very hand to drain a marsh, you wait and see. And his soul—ah,

you should see his eyes! His father's eyes. Now they won't let me write any more. I will tell you more next time. I have sent him a kiss with my eyes, from you—and there is a kiss for you in my thoughts.

"KYLLIKKI (the happy mother)."

THE HOMECOMING

THE autumn sun was setting; it smiled upon the meadows, gleamed in the window-panes, and threw a kindly glow upon the distant forest. The air was cool.

Olof was in a strange mood to-day. He walked with light, springy step, and could not keep still for a moment; he was uneasy, and yet glad. He had sent a man to the station with a horse, and the little servant-maid had been dispatched on an errand to a distant village—he wished to be alone.

He stepped hastily into the bedroom, gave a searching glance round, looked at the thermometer on the wall, and laughed.

"Aha—beginning to look all right now."

Then he went back to the sitting-room. The coffee-pot was simmering its quiet, cheerful song on the fire; close by lay a goodly heap of white pine logs.

He lifted the pot from the fire, poured out a little of the coffee in a cup, and poured it back again. Then, thrusting his hands into his pockets, he walked up and down, smiling and whistling to himself.

"Wonder what she will think, when I don't come to the station to meet her there? But she'll understand . . . yes. . . ."

He went back to the fire, poured out another half-cup of coffee, and tasted it.

"H'm—yes. It's good, I think it's good."

He took a bit of rag, wiped the pot carefully, and set it back. Then he looked at the clock.

"They ought to be at Aittamaki by now—or Simola at least. . . ."

He stepped across to the cupboard, took out a white cloth and spread it on a tray, set out cups and saucers, cream jug and sugar bowl, and placed the tray on the table.

"There—that looks all right!"

Again he glanced impatiently at the clock.

"They'll be at the cross-roads now, at Vaarakorva . . . might take that little stretch at a trot . . . if only they don't drive too hard. Well, Kyllikki 'll look to that herself . . ."

Again he felt that curious sense of lightness—as if all that weighed and burdened had melted away, leaving only a thin, slight shell, that would hardly keep to earth at all. He tramped up and down, looking out of the window every moment, not knowing what to do with himself.

"Now!" he cried, looking at the clock again. "Ten minutes more and they should be here!"

He sprang to the fire and threw on an armful of fine dry wood.

"There! Now blaze up as hard as you like. Bright eyes and a warm heart to greet them!"

He went into the bedroom and brought out a tiny basket-work cradle, that he had made himself. The bedding was ready prepared, white sheets hung down over the side, and a red-patterned rug smiled warmly—at the head a soft pillow in a snow-white case.

"There!" He set the cradle before the fire, and drew up

the sofa close by. "He can lie there and we can sit here and look at him."

And now that all was ready, a dizziness of joy came over him—it seemed too good to be true. He looked out through the window once more; went out on to the steps and gazed down the road. Looked and listened, came back into the room, and was on the point of starting out to meet them, but thought of the fire—no, he could not leave the house.

At last—the brown figure of a horse showed out from behind the trees at the turn of the road. And at the sight his heart throbbed so violently that he could not move a step; he stood there, looking out through the window—at the horse and cart, at Kyllikki with her white kerchief, and at the bundle in her arms.

Now they were at the gate. Olof ran out bareheaded, dashing down the path.

"Welcome!" he shouted as he ran.

"Olof!" Kyllikki's voice was soft as ever, and her eyes gleamed tenderly.

"Give him to me!" cried Olof, stretching out his arms impatiently.

And Kyllikki smiled and handed him a tiny bundle wrapped in woollen rugs.

Olof's hands trembled as he felt the weight of it in his arms.

"Help her down, Antti; and come back a little later on—I won't ask you in—not just now," he said confusedly to the driver.

The man laughed, and Kyllikki joined in.

But Olof took no heed—he was already on the way in with his burden. A few steps up the path he stopped, and

lifted a corner of the wrappings with one hand. A tiny reddish face with two bright eyes looked up at him.

A tremor of delight thrilled him at the sight; he clasped the bundle closer to his breast, as if fearing to lose it. Hastily he covered up the little face once more, and hurried in.

Kyllikki watched him with beaming eyes. Following after, she stood in the doorway and looked round, with a little cry of surprise and pleasure, taking it all in at a glance—the genial welcome of the blazing fire, the tiny bed,—he had told her nothing of this,—the sofa close by, and the tray set out on the table, and coffee standing ready. . . .

But Olof was bending over the cradle.

"These things—is it safe to undo them?" he asked, fumbling with safety-pins.

"Yes, that's all right," laughed Kyllikki, loosening her own cloak.

Olof had taken off the outer wrappings. He lifted the little arms, held the boy upright, looking at him critically, like a doctor examining recruits. "Long in the limbs—and sound enough, by the look of him!" Then he gazed earnestly into the child's face, with its wise, bright eyes, and seemed to find something there that promised well for the future.

"Dear little rascal!" he cried ecstatically, and tenderly he kissed the child's forehead. The boy made no sound, but seemed to be observing the pair.

Olof laid him down in the cradle. "Can't he say anything? Can't you laugh, little son?"

He blinked his eyes, smacked his lips, and uttered a little whistling sound as if calling some shy bird—he had never seen anything like it; it seemed to come of itself.

"Laughing—he's laughing . . . that's the way!"

Kyllikki was standing behind him, leaning against the sofa, watching them both.

"And his hands! Sturdy hands to drain a marsh! So mother was right, was she? Ey, such a little fist! A real marsh-mole!" And he kissed the tiny hands delightedly.

"But look at his nails—they want cutting already. Ah, yes, mother knew father would like to do it himself, so she did."

And he hurried to Kyllikki's work-basket, and took out a small pair of scissors. "Father'll manage it—come!"

And he fell on his knees beside the bed.

"Don't be afraid—softly, softly—there! Father's hands are none so hard, for all he's so big." He cut the nails, kissing the little fingers in between.

The boy laughed. Kyllikki leaned over towards them, smiling more warmly still.

"There—now it's done! Look at him, Kyllikki! Isn't he splendid?" And he turned towards her. "But what—what am I thinking of all the time! Kyllikki, I haven't even kissed you yet. Welcome, dear, welcome a thousand times!"

He took her in his arms. "How well you look—and lovely! Why, you look younger than ever! Little mother—how shall I ever thank you for—this!"

"It was your gift to me," said Kyllikki softly, with a tender glance at the little bed.

Olof led her to a seat, and they talked together in the silent speech of the eyes that is for great moments only.

. . . . . .

"Why . . .!" Olof sprang up suddenly. "I'm forgetting

everything to-day. Here I've made coffee all ready, and now . . ."

He lifted the coffee-pot and set it on the tray.

"Did you make the coffee?" asked Kyllikki, smiling in wonder.

"And who else should do it on such a day? Here!"

And they sat down to table, without a word.

. . . . . .

Presently the child began to whimper. Both rose to their feet.

"What's the matter, then—did it hurt?" said Kyllikki tenderly. She lifted the little one in her arms, and began talking to him with her eyes, and smiling, with delicious little movements of her head.

The child began to laugh.

Without a word she laid him in Olof's arms. He thanked her with a look, and held the boy close to his breast. All else seemed to have vanished but this one thing. And he felt the warmth of the little body gradually spreading through clothes and wrappings to his own . . . it was like a gentle, soft caress. It thrilled him—and the arms that held the little burden trembled; he could not speak, but handed it back in silence to the mother.

She laid it in the cradle, set the pillow aright, and pulled up the coverlet, leaving only a little face showing above.

"It is a great trust, to be given such a little life to care for," said Olof, with a quiver in his voice, as they sat down on the sofa. "It seems too great a thing to be possible, somehow."

"But it is," said Kyllikki. "And do you know what I

think? That forgiveness is a greater thing than punishment —and Life knows it!"

He nodded, and pressed her hand.

Again he glanced at the little red face on the pillow, and an expression of earnestness, almost of gloom, came over his own.

"Olof," said Kyllikki softly, taking his hand, "will you tell me what you are thinking of just now?"

He did not answer at once.

"No, no—you need not tell me. I know. But why think of that now, Olof? And you know—he at least has a father and mother who have learned something of life; maybe he will not need to go through all we have done to get so far. . . ."

"Ay, that was what I was thinking," said Olof.

And no more was said, but heartfelt wishes hovered protectingly about the little bed.

. . . . . .

"Look now!" cried Kyllikki, after a while. "He's fallen asleep! Isn't he lovely?"

And warm sunshine seemed to fill the room—even to its darkest corner.

"Olof?" said Kyllikki, with a questioning glance towards the door of the adjoining room.

His face lit up, and together they stole on tiptoe to the door; Olof opened it, and Kyllikki stood on the threshold, looking into the little room—it was newly papered, and looked larger and brighter than before.

She turned and took his hand—her eyes told him all she thought and felt.

He put his arm round her waist, and his eyes lit with a sudden gleam of recollection.

"I told you once," he said dreamily, as they walked back into the sitting-room, "how sister Maya came to call me home, when I was still wandering about from place to place."

"Yes, I remember; it was so beautiful, Olof—I shall never forget."

"And how we came home after, and began . . ."

They had reached the window now. "Look!" said Olof suddenly, pointing out.

Down in the valley lay the marsh of Isosuo, spreading away almost immeasurably on every side. At the edge of the water two big channels were being cut, in front were a host of workmen clearing timber, while others behind them dug the channels in the soil. It was like the march of two great armies towards the land of the future. The setting sun cast its red glow over the powerful shoulders of the men as they worked, here and there a spade or an axe flashed for a moment; the water in the dykes glittered like silver, and the moist earth at the edge shone with a metallic gleam.

"Ah!" cried Kyllikki joyfully. "The work has begun!"

Olof turned her gently from the window towards him, put his arms round her, and looked into her eyes, as if trying to sum up in a single glance all they had seen and suffered, lived through and hoped.

"Yes, the work has begun," he said softly, and held her closer to his breast.